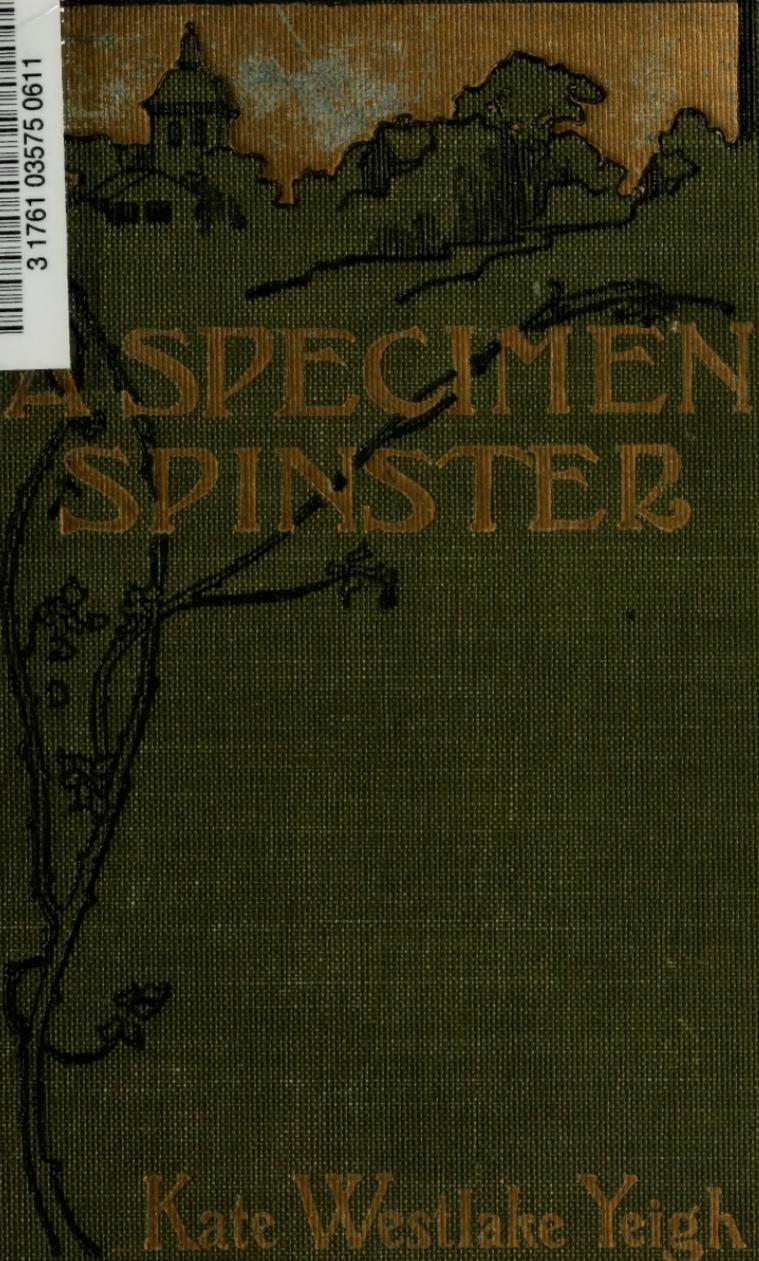


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A SPECIMEN SPINSTER

Kate Westlake Yeigh



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A SPECIMEN SPINSTER

A

SPECIMEN SPINSTER

BY

KATE WESTLAKE YEIGH

TORONTO

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1905

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TO

THE MEMORY OF MY SISTER NELLIE,
WHOSE BRAVE AND LOVING SPIRIT
REMAINS EVER A LIVING INFLUENCE

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A SPECIMEN SPINSTER

CHAPTER I

WHEN I came to a realising sense that, after having been born with the name of Wogg, some one had wilfully added Mary to it, I'd just have had to quit right there, only that I determined I'd be no ordinary girl.

That's how I began to be called queer, even in my early days.

Like as not I looked queer. If a tin-type is good evidence, I most surely did.

I was given the name of Mary without my knowledge or consent, but at home I was never nick-named Polly. I had other names in plenty, but that I never heard. I reckon it had been tried on me before I could answer to it, and met with a just reward.

No, at home I was never called Polly.

Mollikano, with the accent on the k—Italian version of Molly—was my most high-sounding title, the one I liked least being Pope-pious-cum-Sunday.

This name was given me when my queerness, natural or acquired, took the form of early piety. It used to strike me mostly on Sunday mornings, early, when I'd lie awake in bed waiting to be called. I'd sometimes be struck so hard that I'd rise before the bell rang, with my determination to be a better girl in full working order. I was firmly resolved to do everything I was told, first time of telling (if it wasn't possible to do it before); not to answer back, not to say a cross word, or do a selfish deed; to set a good example and live perfect in the sight of a perverse and persecuting set of brothers, sisters, and miscellaneous relatives.

They didn't stand it very well. They might have borne it better, only sometimes I'd surprise them by going to breakfast in the middle of the week with what they called my Pious-cum-Sunday look on, hence arose the name which stuck to me long after I'd ceased to deserve it.

It was a very busy Sunday that I'd be allowed to keep my good fit until church time, and frequently I'd prove myself a child of sin, and

perfection a vanished dream, before breakfast was over, and keep heaping up unnecessary evidence right along. Sometimes the testimony would be words only, but often it took the form of a flying hair-brush or a dipper of water.

But 'twas all in vain that other names were found for me. I went to school one unhappy day, and that day I was called Polly Wogg, and Polly Wogg I've wiggled ever since.

It was that first day at school that fixed my lot.

In heartrending anguish of spirit I took stock of myself. It was out in the hay-loft, half buried in the sweet-smelling hay, half drowned in tears, that I made my inventory. Natural depravity and family opposition prevented my being good; freckles and bung-eyes put beauty out of sight; of wealth there was no hope; having no voice I couldn't sing; being afraid to let go with my hands unless I had hold with my feet put circus-riding out of the question; it was altogether too, too late to be born a boy, so I simply had to be smart—I *had* to, or I could not bear my lot.

To be called Polly Wogg and be just like other girls would be too much. And thus it came about that folks got to calling me queer.

But I'm not queer.

I like enough have my own ways, and my own opinions ; but they're right ways and right opinions, and there's nothing queer about that ! I found out long ago that I missed my mark in being smart, but I've hardly yet come to the point of thinking myself just plain ordinary.

What a long look backward it is to the old days, to the beginning of things, to the dear old home ! There used to be such a lot of us, waking the echoes in the old farm-house, chasing each other through the orchard, playing pirates in the barn and Indians in the bush—playing, working, squabbling, reading, dreaming, laughing nearly every waking hour, laughing at anything or at nothing, at our pains and our pleasures, our disappointments and our conceits. There were such a lot of us, and we loved each other and were happy.

And now I'm all alone. Not one of all our name left, not one but me.

From my back veranda, down here on the side line on the outskirts of our little village, I can look up over the hill beyond the sugar-maple grove and see the chimneys of the old home. In my mind I can see the house standing white and square, with muslin curtains in the windows and a rose vine climbing over the front porch, but always I seem to see a hearse at the

door, and I wait to see it lead the way down the road, over the bridge to the little tangled grass-grown cemetery, where nearly all I love lie sleeping. So quietly, so peacefully they sleep, not so far away but I can always feel them near me.

I suppose nobody in this world is ever right happy for very long at a time, not even in Canada, but it does seem to me I might have been if our land boom hadn't happened.

I'm not much at giving advice—and no better at taking it than other folks—but I do say, if ever you have a choice between a cyclone, a fire or a flood, and a land boom, you'd do well to answer quite respectfully: "Please send along all three, but keep your boom."

There's nothing so deceiving and demoralising, and you never get over it, never.

If it hadn't been for our boom I'd never have been bothered with the Joneses—my girl Hannah always calls them the Joneses—and if it wasn't for the Joneses I wouldn't be forever at my back veranda seeing what they're going to do next; I wouldn't have a thing to grumble at, and my spirit would be as unruffled as a frog pond.

But it *is* for the Joneses. They're there. My back fence runs along the side of their lot,

their summer kitchen door looks plumb out over my hen-yard and back garden, so unless I go out of doors backward I can't miss them, and if I'd been born blind I could hear them, even in my sleep. For there's seven children under twelve, of which six are boys—and if there's one thing more than another I'm partial to it isn't boys!

The boom did it. I was every kind of a fool, for I was taken in, and put out, more than anybody. The trouble came through a line of railway being surveyed right across the home farm, cutting through the whole two hundred acres on a slant—in at the south-east corner and out at the north-west. They got an option from me at so much, so very much, an acre. The interest on it would give me a great big income, and I'd be rich enough to travel round the world.

Every one that owned a foot of land in the neighbourhood went wild. We would all be rich; we'd be a town, a city, right away. All roads led our way: there was water power, there was rich land, nothing could stop our growth—when the railway came.

We were dreadfully worried over what our station would be called, seeing we had hardly what you could call a name. We generally spoke

of ourselves as "The Corners," but our post-office was "Milton's," and our village "Milton's Corners." Perhaps the name was intended to remind us of "Paradise Lost," for we never had a Milton in the neighbourhood. In the old days it used to be known as the Mill, and when a tavern, a blacksmith's shop, a cooper shop, and a store were built where the roads met, the name was changed to the Milltown or the Corners, and so it was contracted to Milton's.

Everybody talked about laying out their land into town lots, but I did it.

I laid out the hundred and sixty acres adjoining the home farm at the west, into choice building lots. It runs along the side line from the main road back to the creek, and I had the finest plan that could be drawn—red-ink and all; the streets, all fine and wide, were named for trees, and the auction sale bills were just a picture! I reserved the lots facing the main road; they'd be wanted for station or stores or town hall, sure, and if I'd reserved everything I'd have been a happier and a richer woman. For the day before the sale the news came in the weekly papers that the railway line was located four miles south, and only five of all my beautiful town lots were sold. Dixon Gummage bought fifty feet

just back of where I'd begun to build a house for myself; he paid half of the money down, and I took a mortgage for the rest. He made me open up a whole street, though I offered him a hundred dollars to give me back my lot—being stubborn, he wouldn't—and that's how he came to be called, "No. 1 Maple Street," to the day of his death. For none of the others paid for their lots, and there was he stuck behind me with a tall narrow two-storey house, and all its windows looking out my way.

I'd been building my house while the land was being laid out, having rented the home farm on shares, and there I had to live on the side line next-neighbour to Gummage, and get over my vanished dreams of wealth and the land boom that went wrong, the best way I could.

I thought it was as bad as could be while he lived, for a crustier old man than Gummage never made barrels—and coopers have a name for crustiness—but he died, leaving the house and lot to his daughter Aggie, who had married Simon Jones. That's how the family came to be planted, as you might say, right at my feet.

We went to school together, Aggie and I, being much of an age, but we were never friends. I was a romp and a tom-boy, and she

had a soft, droopy way with her, carried a finger in her mouth, and kept tugging at her pinny as if she wanted to put a corner of it in her mouth too. She had a shy look, but she wasn't shy. She was quite bold some ways—I've seen her!

There was a boy at school—there was more than one, but only one that mattered to me. His name was Tom—Tom Gray. He was big, strong, fair-haired, not very clever, you'd wonder why everybody liked him. I always saw Tom, though I never looked at him. And he—well, I knew he liked me. I knew at first because he used to tease the other girls, chasing them, running off with their books, but when he'd see me he'd run, just run away real fast. Afterwards, I knew in other ways.

Our family didn't visit much with the Grays. Mrs Gray was very reserved, and Mr Gray was much older, and a very serious man. They lived on the Gore road, and didn't go to our church. We met them every Sunday morning generally at the foot of the hill, but I had seen them long before that. I never failed to notice the minute Mrs Gray saw us, and the little nudge she gave Tom. I could in fancy hear her say : "Tom, there's Mary," and I felt sure he replied : "I don't care," for he always whistled

and looked away. Besides, he told me about it, later on.

Nobody ever noticed anything. Nobody ever knew. I never was teased about Tom. He was such a big, hearty fellow with a happy face and jolly laugh—a man grown, and doing a man's work, at eighteen. I liked the way his saucy dark eyes would soften when he saw me, and his way of treating me, quite different to the other girls. He was free with them. He never said very much, but I knew—he knew that quite well. I didn't mind that he was only a farmer, with never a wish to be anything else. I liked him even in his old clothes and the rusty top-boots he'd been ploughing in. I'd walk a mile any day, gladly, just to see him cross the road to the south field with his free stride and uplifted head. So young and strong in the morning—to be carried home before noon, dead!

You see they were chopping in the bush, the tree was ready to fall, when his little brother—always was in the way—ran by, and Tom sprang to save him. His back was broken. He never spoke, but his smile was there on his dead lips, sweet and happy as it had always been.

I didn't shed a tear at the funeral, though his mother held my hand. Aggie Gummage cried,

she cried out loud. Everybody noticed, and there was talk—they said : “Poor Aggie ! There must have been something between them. See how she cared for him.”

It doesn’t matter to me now. He’s safe in heaven ; I’m Mary Wogg still, and Aggie is Mrs Jones.

I could be thankful for almost anything but having her at my back door.

CHAPTER II

SATURDAY is my busy day.

It's most folks' busy day, seems like ; not that we do more, but we make more fuss about it, and hate worse than ordinary to be disturbed at it.

I had led my girl Hannah a life all morning, and by three o'clock had the whole house, everything in it or near it, about as nearly clean as you can get it in a world that's made mostly of dirt.

I try to do my duty by Hannah. She was recommended to me as the worst girl in the district, and when she came she gave herself a most dreadful character. She says : "If you take me, I wish you joy of me ! But you can't make me work, and you can't keep me straight."

Being dared, as it were, I took her. If she knew anything, it wasn't housework. That was four years ago when my house was first built, and I've lived a life ; but there's nothing she can't do now as well as I, or maybe better.

She still says she hates work and loves the bottle, and warns me: "You just wait till the soldiers come marching by, or I get the drink in me!" But thus far I've never had any evidence that she ever saw a bottle to desire it, or a soldier either.

Hannah had gone to her room to make herself fit to sit in the clean kitchen, and I was taking the last pan of cookies out of the oven, when "patter-patter," up the walk, across the new scrubbed veranda came the sound of bare feet a-shuffling.

Turning the cookies out on a platter, I looked around, and there in the doorway stood five little Jones boys, looking in with open mouths. Their eyes may have been open too, but you couldn't see them for the caverns below.

If five had to come, why hadn't six? I wondered. Which one could be missing no one could guess, there being no room between any of them for another, unless at the top of the line—which I knew it wasn't.

I looked at the string of them, such a peeky, dirty, half-naked, half-starved, wholly-neglected lot, you couldn't help but be sorry for them, even if you hadn't room inside for anything but mad.

They couldn't help it if their mother was

no manager; I didn't blame them, but I did wish Dixon Gummage had lived and kept the Joneses from living at my back door. I don't remember being sorrier for the taking away of any one I didn't like as much as I did Dixon's.

There they were, though, and always borrowing; but no matter how mean you feel you can't act mean to little children, not even to boys. So when they said in chorus, would I lend their mother my copper preserving kettle? I said "Yes," when I meant the coldest "No" that ever was.

I set more store by that kettle than anything I own, except maybe my brass candlesticks, or fire-irons, or copper warming-pan—all of them being things brought out from the old country, long enough ago. It's just beautiful, is that preserving kettle. It holds full two pecks, it's shaped like a dish-pan with handles at the two sides, and when its scoured up its best (as it always is) it's a picture, and would look just as handsome hung on the wall as the shield of a fighting ancestor. I prize it, I keep it real choice, only using it for jelly and preserves, or once in a while to boil a whole ham or a leg of mutton. It's the biggest pot I own, except the wash-boiler.

As soon as I said Mrs Jones could have it, I groaned, knowing the scouring it would need when I got it back ; knowing, too, how my fore-mothers, who owned it in the old land, would squirm if they guessed the kind of house it was going into.

I was just ashamed, felt as if I were disgracing an innocent, unconscious object. To think of sending five boys for it, when it would have been so much easier to refuse one ! There they stood, five of them, with about enough skin and bone to make one hearty boy, but not enough clothes between them to cover him after he was made ! Their little panties were all made the same shape behind as before— maybe so they could wear 'em reversible—with buttons off, and holes wherever there was room for one.

"Why did your mother send the whole family ?" says I.

"She didn't," piped one. "She sent Ted, only he was scared to come alone, and when we got a fightin' over it she said for all to go quick ; so we all goed 'cept Johnnie, and Johnnie he's in town with faaver, and the baby's sick."

"Which one is Ted ?" I asked. At that a middle-sized one ducked down his chin into his chest and began wagging his head from

side to side as if it was on a pivot, like a Chinese mandarin gone daft, until he made me dizzy.

“Don’t do that, sonny,” says I, sitting down and shutting my eyes, feeling sure his head would go right around and never come back. It was such a waggle, his hair all jiggled, covering his eyes up completely.

“Why were you scared to come alone?” I asked, but as he neither looked nor spoke, only began revolving his head again, I gave up, thinking to myself: “There is better and worse even of the Jones’ boys, and Teddy is the worst of all.”

To them all I said: “Well, boys, what are you looking at?”

“Nawthin’,” they drawled out all together, never moving their eyes from the cookies.

“Are you sure? Didn’t you see the cookies? They are just out of the oven, and there’s raisins and peel in them. I thought you looked like you could eat some of them.”

When I brought them in and gave them one each as a sample, you should have seen their eyes! I thought it would be worth a lot to see a change in those eyes—to see how they’d look if they weren’t hungry. I tried nice fresh buns and butter, with honey on them, first; then

some seed cake and milk, and an apple each; and I don't know when I enjoyed a meal so much.

When I offered them more cookies they looked as if they would surely cry, only I said real quick: "If you don't want to eat them, you can carry them home with some more apples. Here's some for your mother too, and Johnnie."

Not wishing to trust them with my precious kettle I said I'd carry it over myself, so off they trooped, full for once. You'd think for sure they had sieves under their bits of jackets, instead of stomachs.

Oh, I did begrudge to lend my kettle! I looked at it, felt it, rubbed it lovingly with a chamois, then hurried off, fearing I couldn't let it go if I waited another minute.

I crawled through a gap in the fence into the Jones' yard, where the little limbs had wrenched off a board; the first thing that met my sight being Aggie Jones tipping a tubful of suds down the kitchen steps. Bless my boots! if there wasn't a puddle inches deep, and the nasty, dirty suds all over the door yard. Some clothes were hanging on the line —such clothes, and such a colour!—while more wet things were in a basket at the door, and the state of the summer kitchen fairly turned me sick.

“Saturday is your wash day, is it, Mrs Jones?” says I, being obliged to say something.

“Yes,” she answered, sitting down on the wood-box, all limp and white, as if she was too tired to stand or speak. “I like to have the youngsters clean for Sunday, and some of them wear their clothes all week to school.”

“Ain’t you well?” I asked.

“No, I’m not ever right strong. I’m not smart like you, Miss Wogg; I don’t ever get on with my work.” (It used to be Aggie and Polly before we lived neighbours.)

We talked a bit until I got her to go lie down while I tidied up. I felt so sorry for her when I looked at her; but when I saw the dirt I felt sorry for Jones. Dear, dear! such a house, I’d die cleaning it, or die of the dirt, for live in it I would not! And when I tried to find dusters, towels, soap, I found there wasn’t anything to do with—not enough of one single needful thing, not enough dishes to go round, next to nothing to clean with or cook with. The discomfort of it, the unhandiness, the dirt!

I worked hard for three hours, sweeping, wiping up, straightening, hanging out clothes, cleaning the windows, blacking the stove, washing the dishes and the pots and pans; and if you’ll believe me, I thought I’d never get

to the bottom of them. There was a difference that you could see and smell in the two kitchens, and not liking to go further into the house for fear of finding worse, I thought I'd better go home. In a sort of railed-in settle with rockers on it the baby had been lying asleep all this time, but as I was leaving I saw she had wakened. She's a girl baby, four or five months old, but very tiny; and as she sort of cooed at me, friendly, I thought I'd take her home and bring her back after tea.

Passing the boys in the yard, where they were playing, I told them to be good and not wake their mother, and I'd take care of the baby.

She was such a good little sample. She ate good bread and milk, also cold rice pudding with cream, just like a woman, going off to sleep the minute I laid her on the lounge. It looked so funny to see a baby there that I sat where I could watch her all the time I took my tea. After awhile she stirred, opening her big eyes, but never a sign of crying, the sweet wee thing!

I took her up and thought I'd undress her—scared, too, I was, babies being such frail crockery. Nothing breaking, I got bolder—I did think it would be nice if she could be right down clean once before she grew up.

Hannah got me warm, soft water in a little tub, and when I souced her in it she was so tickled she laughed out loud. She had a good soak; I rinsed and dried her well, she as pleased as pie all the time, and that sweet you could eat her. I put the cleanest of her fixings back on her, somehow, leaving off the drabbled long-tailed outer ones; then with a soft shawl wrapped around her, I sat in the big rocker in the bay-window with her in my arms.

She kind of snuggled in to me, tucking her head in close, so I held her tight, rocking and singing, "I'm a pilgrim."

The dusk was coming on.

Outside, the shadow of the old crab tree lay dark across the veranda. The birds were twittering low, a soft good-night. The sound of a cow-bell and the smell of new-turned earth came floating in. Memories of the long ago woke within me. I could see the old home with all its old, crude furniture, the broad-armed, battered rocker in the corner, where I used to rock my baby sister off to sleep: the dear baby that we loved so—the first of all of us to be called up higher.

I could see myself as I used to be, a big, romping girl with long braids hanging down her back, the best runner and jumper, and

the worst tom-boy anywhere. Such a bad habit I had of feeling things, and such a fear of showing it.

I thought of Tom. Saw him as he was, and as he might have been. Saw him as a man and me a woman. Heard pattering footsteps cross the floor, the sound of little voices calling, "Mother!"—calling, "Mother!" meaning me. Felt all round me the warmth of home love, the care of strong arms, the touch of baby fingers clinging to me in the darkness.

In the darkness I was crying to myself and kissing the wee hands of the Jones baby.

Well, most of us are fools ; the older we grow, the bigger fools we get—but the biggest of all are those who tell of it.

It was getting late when I took the baby home all wrapped up. I was feeling as sentimental as a mixture of gloaming and moonlight could make me, but when I got into the Jones' yard a change came.

For there if Mr Jones and the boys hadn't lighted a big fire out-of-doors, and were making soap in my precious copper kettle !

I could have roasted every one of the Jones family, right willingly, there in their own bonfire, baby and all.

CHAPTER III

BEING really raring, tearing, roaring — vexed, on Saturday night isn't good preparation for the Sabbath day, but somehow when I saw the sun shining, the birds singing their Sunday hymn of praise, I found I didn't feel much more cantankerous than usual.

When you can step out of a nice clean bed feeling you've had enough sleep, full of health and vigour; when you can stretch up your arms as high and out as wide as you can reach without discovering an ache or a pain anywhere; when your flesh, blood, bones, muscles, nerves and brain all send out word, "I'm quite well, thank you," you'd be a pretty mean woman not to lift up grateful eyes.

Just health is a lot to be thankful for, plain, everyday health; with everything working together so well you don't ever think about your system at all. Why, there are people who say they always get up tired! who say they never draw a breath without feeling it!

who say they are never free from pain—who do their work, go pleasuring, live, eat, sleep, with one thing or another always hurting them! That seems to me not to be living at all. While I, I am so well and strong I can do downright foolish things and not suffer for it; I can go to bed that tired I hardly take time to say my prayers, go to sleep as soon as my head touches the pillow, never waking until morning, when I rise as if new made, as fresh as a June dawn. For all these things I give thanks—when I think of them.

I always start off for church in good time Sunday mornings because I like my own corner, my own book and footstool. The sermon doesn't reach me quite the same if it strikes me at a wrong angle.

Our pastor is a great expounder, preaches stronger on faith than works—being a genuine hard-shell Baptist—but personally he puts in great licks on works.

He gives us real good sermons, rising on his toes and pounding the desk, instead of raising his voice, because he has a throat trouble.

In the morning he feeds the sheep, and in the evening the goats.

I let Hannah go in the evenings.

He said his subject this morning was "Neighbourliness," his text being, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."

I settled down to listen. After a bit I began to think. Round me were people I knew well, more than half of 'em members of the church, as I was. I travelled along from pew to pew to pick out the ones I loved. I don't talk much about love: I hold it sacred, keeping it among the words that are most precious to me. "Like" will do for common things and common people. It seemed, though, as I thought about it, that the Lord didn't keep it so choice. He talked a lot about loving those about Him—pretty small, mean folks some of them were too; He spoke of loving some who next minute turned their backs on Him.

I kept listening to the sermon with one ear, while both my eyes and half my mind went on searching the congregation.

Love must mean really *love*, you'd think, not "wishing no harm," nor "wishing well," nor "not disliking." I tried to be real faithful, but when I summed up I felt ashamed to face myself, let alone Those above. There wasn't one I held a grudge against, there weren't

many but what I felt kindly to, there were a dozen or so I respected, there were two or three I really liked, but could I honestly say: "There's one I love"? And if we weren't the "one another" that the text meant, who were?

The pastor ended up nice and comforting. He said we all did love each other, of course. He could read it in our faces, feel it in the grasp of our hands, see it in our loyalty and generosity to the cause, and our patience with him, with all his infirmities. "Can you?" says I to myself. "That's good, but for the life of me I can't."

There was a plenty of handshaking after church: folks seeming really cordial, which so did I, though my mind didn't feel real easy. A nice dinner eased it some. I felt I loved Hannah at all events, especially as she was improving all the time in her cooking. Then I settled down in the shady corner of the side veranda with a book and some papers, feeling at peace with all the world, and started in to enjoy the time of all the week I like the best.

I don't hold with Sunday visiting. I never go places, and I never ask people here—except some stranger visiting the Corners, who couldn't come any other time. And I don't ask them if I can help it. I like to be all to myself, to

read, write letters, take a nap, or maybe look over my treasures, or rearrange my bureau drawers. I like to be real free to be happy or miserable, just as I please, with no one to interfere. But folks will drop in sometimes, and if I'm real sure they don't take Sunday to save them from wasting time paying a visit in the week, I try to be as pleased as I ever can. It 'most dislocates something to work up a smile at times, I will say, especially as I can guess what they say before they come. I fancy I hear them say: "I really must call on Aunt Polly Wogg. I haven't run in for ages, and if I leave it to a week-day it will spoil a whole afternoon, and I'm so busy!" And then they come and spoil more than one afternoon for me, for my spirit and my temper suffers a lot.

Nobody ever comes to my front door, hardly. I have the front garden so nice with beds of flowers, and a cedar hedge and a gate that is so hard to open it would scare a tin pedlar. It's a beautiful garden; you can enjoy it fine from the front windows, if you're ever there—which I rarely am. I laid out to have a gate that would keep cattle and dogs out, and it keeps out everything.

Folks always come round the corner and down

the street (which only leads to the Joneses, besides), and come in at the side gate. So, if I'm on the veranda, I'm caught, sure.

It was such a lovely Sunday afternoon, with a gentle breeze, a bright sun, and nature in her May Queen dress. Oh, it was sweet! The lilac bushes and the hawthorns seemed clapping their hands, the flowers in the border and the new-turned earth breathed out their fragrant breath, the fleecy clouds in the blue sky looked like baby angels. There was nothing but quiet joy, peace and beauty anywhere. I felt it was so easy to be good, I could love almost anybody. Then I saw Martha Shanklin coming, waving her hand to me before she left the main road. My heart sank down and down, for my book was so nice, it wasn't three o'clock yet, and there wouldn't be another Sunday for six days.

"Well, you do look comfortable, only lonesome," said Martha. "Now I never have a chance to be lonesome; there are too many in our house for that. It's Marthy here and Marthy there with Pa and Ma and poor Carrie; not to speak of Aunty Cynthy and Bill's boys, and often Bill, when he loses his job."

She sat down in my chair, took the pins out of her hat and held it in her lap.

"You look tired," says I. "Are you quite well?"

"Me, well? I don't dare be anything else, I've so much to do, and Aunt is so trying. I could stand everything only for Aunt, she's so interfering. I never, never can have my own way. I never, never get anything I want, and I work and work, and no thanks for it. Your Hannah has a heavenly time compared to me, and has her wages at the end of the month."

"Life is trying sometimes," I said. "How was your brother William when you saw him last?"

"Bill? Oh, he's well enough. He's here now. Out of work again. I call it downright sinful the way he let's Tilda's death discourage him. Of course nobody will put up with him long, he's that down. He says he's downed, and'll have to stay downed. There's no get-up to him, that's sure. He does take it hard, he makes everybody that grumpy! I just couldn't stand it another minute, so I said: 'I'll take a run over to see Aunt Polly Wogg' (we always call you that at home—most everybody does, you know), and I got away before Aunt Cynthy could call me back."

"I'm sorry for William," I said. "Losing Matilda was an awful blow, and so sudden,

and having to break up his home and be left with two little children, I don't wonder he's broken-spirited."

"Yes, but it's me that has the children, and him, too. We have just five times as much cause to fret as he has. It's all right for you to pity him. You don't know a thing about it, here with a house to yourself and plenty to do with. Oh, dear me! I sometimes wish I had got married and had a house of my own."

She seemed like she'd cry in another minute, so I went for a glass of milk and a cookie for her, and when I came out began talking about the sermon.

"Yes, it was a good sermon. Mr Paterson preaches all right," said Martha, adding snappishly: "But Deacon Stubbs is common. He's almost vulgar, I call him. He shook hands with me, and he said: 'The pastor got after you this morning, Miss Martha. He gave you old maids something to think about,' and he laughed his nasty, fat chuckle. I just hate to be called an old maid, don't you, Mary? Now, don't you?"

Seemed as if she was giving me a bit of a drive, 'most as bad as the deacon gave her, but I puckered up the best smile I could, and says I: "Come to think, I don't believe any

of us likes to be called 'old' anything. Old girl, old wife, old woman, old lady, old granny, old thing—who would choose any of them? I don't mind being called a maid, a maiden lady, a spinster, a single woman, an unmarried female, or even a she-bachelor, but I can't say 'old maid' pleases me."

"Nor me, neither," said Martha; "I hate it. And, Polly, don't you ever wish you were married?"

"Why, Martha? Do you?"

"Do I? Yes, I just do. I'm tired of it—tired of being everybody's slave and in everybody's way. Tired of asking Pa for money to buy my clothes and not getting it. Dead tired of not even having a corner of a room to myself, or a place I can keep a thing, or a minute to call my own. I about wish I'd married Simon Jones. He paid me attentions, you know, Mary, long before he ever noticed Aggie Gummage."

"I didn't know, Martha. But at a cursory glance, it doesn't look as if you missed much."

"Perhaps I'd made a man of him," she said, with a sniff. "But that Aggie! Did you ever see such a poor, forlorn, untidy, shabby thing as she is? And they do say her house isn't fit for pigs to live in. And the children are

half-naked, and Jones and all look half-starved. He makes good wages, too. They say she's too lazy to nurse her own children; I know for a fact the last two are bottle babies, and such mites of things. You don't neighbour with them, do you?"

"Not as much as I should," I said, a bit ashamed. "They haven't been there a year yet, and I'm no hand for running in. I never kept up a friendship with Aggie after she left school, and only saw her a few times after she got married and went to town to live. She came in her father's last sickness and stayed right on. She doesn't seem to care for friends."

"Just as well, too," snapped Martha, "for she has none. It's just like her improvidence to be Episcopal, with no church nearer than town. If she went to our church, or the Methodist, the district visitors would call, and maybe more; but as it is, no wonder nobody goes."

It's one thing to abuse a fellow-creature in your own mind, and another to agree when your thought is spoken aloud. I let Martha talk a little more, then asked her if her head ached, or if she was still subject to pains as she used to be.

"Headache? I'm a martyr to it, Mary. If you knew what I suffer! But nobody does. I get no help and little sympathy"—and so on.

I had heard it all before, so knew what I was missing, when, having launched her, I let her run before the breeze and gave myself up to my own thoughts. She was fairly exhausted and crying a little when she stopped, and then I had no trouble to make her go upstairs and lie down on my bed, with the shutters closed and all cool and quiet. By the time she came down I had tea ready, with all the things I knew she liked, and she sat down, looking rosy and happy, and that good-natured she hadn't a hard word to say of even the minister's wife.

When she said how glad she was she'd come to cheer my loneliness, I felt real pleased that she didn't know how much I didn't want her.

She was pinning on her hat to go when I spoke about her pretty curly hair—which I always have admired—and she patted it lovingly, saying: "It is such a bother to me, I can't do a thing with it!" Then she added: "I think it makes me look younger, though, don't you? You're not much older than I am, are you, Polly?"

"You know yourself," says I. "I keep track of my own age, and let folks remember or forget theirs, just as they please." I know she was seven when I was five, but I don't have to tell either her or other people.

"Well, I don't look my age anyway, and I've made up my mind I'm going to get married the very first chance. I don't suppose I'll be happy, but I'd only have one boss, and being miserable is often the best thing for us in this wicked world."

"Oh well, if you take marriage as a means of grace——"

Then she dug her knuckles into my side, playfully, and precious knuckle they were, and skipped off down the path, flouncing her skirts.

CHAPTER IV

FOR two weeks I hadn't seen anything of Mrs Jones.

I had sent Hannah over with one thing and another, two or three times, and I'd seen as much as I wanted of the boys, having had them in to try my baking now and again.

It was Saturday. I'd just driven into the yard, back from town, where Hannah and I take week about to do the shopping, and before I'd stepped out of the buggy Hannah ran out all breathless.

"Miss Wogg," says she, "you're wanted over to the Joneses. Mrs Jones has been took bad. She's been abed a week, and old Sawbones says she's a-dyin', and the littlest boy's fell in the cistern, and the baby's like to die of colict, and Mr Jones he says will you please go over, and will you take over some white rags and some peppermint, if you have any."

I was shocked, and felt a creepy feeling down my spine, but it didn't take me long to change

my dress, put a few things together, and get over there. The little boy wasn't much the worse, nor the water either, as he'd selected the soft water barrel to fall into, instead of the well. He was tucked up warm in the cradle, and Mr Jones was holding the poor suffering baby in his arms.

Mrs Jones was in bed, looking pale and tired, but brighter than usual. "I'm sorry you're not feeling well, Mrs Jones," I said, beginning to straighten a bit. "You're run down, and want nourishing. Let me make you more comfortable. Are you suffering pain?"

She didn't tell me just at first, but after I'd worked round and got things nicer, and was feeding her some soup, she began to cry quietly. Then she said there was no hope for her. She was dying of cancer. She had had it for years. It had been burned out, drawn out, cut out, over and over, but it was all no good. She'd borne up while there was hope, but nothing more could be done now. Her mother had died of it, suffered everything and never told any one. And when she knew she had the same trouble she kept it to herself, and bore up as well as she could, but it made life hard. She said she knew her old friends called her a slop, and said she was too lazy to nurse her own children—when

36 A SPECIMEN SPINSTER

how could she, with the cancer where it was? She knew her children were ragged and her house was dirty, but Simon's money went mostly to pay for doctors and medicines.

Operations cost so much, and she had no ambition, and things got ahead of her. She did suffer, too; sometimes she really suffered awful.

Long before she was through I was sobbing and crying twice as hard as she was—she tried to soothe and comfort me, the brave little woman! And I'd thought hard things of her, and she dying by inches, and no one to say a good word for her. I wonder what my house would have looked like if I'd had to stand her trouble? What right had we to think and speak of her so? She was always kind-spoken, minded her own affairs, and said no ill word of any one. And she'd made her children mind, and her husband just worshipped her, as everybody knew. How sweetly she had spoken of him, “Her dear, good man.”

I hope I've learned a lesson. It'll be more than one while before I set up for Judge and Jury again.

Faith, hope and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity—and I hadn't one speck of it.

There's crape on the door over at the Jones'!

Poor Aggie went very sudden just at the last. It seemed as if after she took to bed her one wish was to go quick.

She had no relations of her own, and wouldn't have Mr Jones' folks come nor any of the neighbours, but I helped all I could, and Hannah was better than a dozen.

There didn't seem one thing to trouble Aggie except about the baby. She fretted about her. She said Jones would get on; he was a Christian man, and real handy, and he'd get resigned. He could care for the boys, or his folks would take them. They'd have to work, but boys could manage somehow; but her baby, her one, wee girl, who would likely never be strong, oh, she didn't know how she ever could leave her!

I knelt down beside her and took her poor thin hand, and I said: "Aggie, could you trust your baby to me?"

And she said solemn and slow: "Mary, I could trust her to you and die happy, thanking God."

I said I'd love her, provide for her whether I lived or died, and bring her up as my own child.

Aggie said: "Thank you. Adopt her legally, Mary, so she'll be really yours. Father, Heavenly Father, I'm glad my tender little

lamb won't be brought up by a man." Then I remembered Aggie had been left alone with her father when she was only ten years old.

I didn't even think what it would mean having a baby in the house, till I woke up suddenly in the night and began to worry.

What would I do, at my time of life, with a baby, me that's nearer forty than thirty, and that set in my ways I can't change when I want to? I know nothing about them, not even how to put on their clothes, or what to feed them, and if they cry I just go crazy wild. Think of having a cradle in my room, and getting up in the night to rock another person's youngster; to have to stay in the house to mind it, to wash, dress and feed it, and have its clothes on the line for all the world to see!

I'll lose Hannah, I know I will. Small loss that would be if I were alone, but with a baby on my hands I'll just be as scared of my girl leaving as other folks. My clean, tidy, quiet house turned into a nursery! I'll have to shorten it, then it will take cold; it must get its teeth, and maybe have convulsions; and then there'll be measles and mumps, croup and other contrapsions.

Suppose it should get sick suddenly in the

night, whatever would I do? I'm a sound sleeper, and maybe it would take a spasm and die, and I'd never hear! I felt like a red-handed murderer, just thinking about it, and it came over me all at once I might just as well have got married and got used to misery gradually as plunge bodily into a sea of troubles as I'd wilfully done.

Things didn't look so bad by daylight—they seldom do—and the first few days that baby was with me got me broken in a bit. I had got that I wasn't afraid she'd break every time I touched her, nor that she'd die every time she cried—which wasn't often, for a better baby I never saw.

It was the evening after the funeral, and Hannah had run out somewhere to talk it all over, I suppose, and though I was left alone with the wee mite I wasn't nervous.

I sat in the dining-room sewing and thinking, jogging the cradle with my foot now and again, as I made the button-holes in a blouse for a Jones boy. It was so quiet that I did jump when there came a great knock at the side door right close to me. I went quick, fearing there would come another bang at the door, and opened it, saying quite sharp: "You shouldn't make so much noise coming to a

person's house this time of night, waking up the children!"

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said the little old man that was standing there, a funny-looking fellow in a big cloth cap and a muffler. "I didn't know as you had any kids to wake."

"Folks get into trouble thinking what they've no call to think. What can I do for you?"

"I'll step in a minute and show you," he said, edging in with a basket on his arm. He looked so queer I thought he was a half-wit, especially bundled up as he was on an early June evening. It wasn't what you'd call warm, for it had rained a cool rain all day, and now there was a breeze, but he had on an overcoat twice too big for him, with sleeves that hung down over his hands.

"I've been real sick," he said, "with pewmonie, and now I'm better I've got to dress warm, being as I've got to work hard to live. I am a book agent, and have here, ma'am, the best medical work in the world—treats principally of the diseases of children, and how to cure them. 'Tain't safe to raise a family without it."

"Looks like an old book," says I, turning over the leaves, "but I don't want it anyway."

"It'll save enough in doctors' bills the first summer to pay for it. Tells how to cure fevers and rashes and fits, and—and lots of things babies always have. It's only three dollars, but seeing it's soiled some you can have it for two-fifty."

I said I didn't want it at any price, but after a lot of talk took it at two dollars. Then he fetched out some teething-rings, safety-pins, soothing syrup, wool bootees, bibs, fuller's earth and magnesia, a tin rattle, a gold-coloured pin with "Darling" on it, and a china mug that was cracked, with "For a good child" most rubbed off it. Such a lot of trash, some old, some new, but mostly for babies or children. It looked as if he must have known I'd just started in the nursery business and stocked up on purpose. He told me how they were all used, and what they were for, in his gruff, wheezy, funny way, and I bought some. But I'm not going to tell what it all came to, so don't expect it.

Well, he hadn't been gone but a few minutes till I saw he'd given me too much change. I'd begun to wish I hadn't bought the things by that time, but keeping a dollar that belonged to a poor, silly old man wouldn't soothe me

any, so I went out of the door and put after him, as fast as I could run.

I got to the main road corner and didn't know in which direction to turn, when a little way off I heard the greatest laughing—three or four people roaring and screaming, as if they'd burst. I walked toward them, and saw in the moonlight that one was my little old man, the rest being girls, but back by the fence stood a tall young man. I went on slow and easy to let them get through their fun, but when I got nearer I could hear he was telling all I'd bought, and what he'd said, and they were just killing themselves laughing.

Then he took off his cap, muffler and coat, throwing them to the young man, and began to dance a jig. I saw light, fluffy hair done up high, skirts tucked up, and a print waist, and I saw it was Nancy Smith!

There stood Dick Gray, and I saw through it all. He had lent her the clothes, the girls had collected the stuff, and Nancy had dressed up like a man—all to make a fool of me—me, who had taught her in Sunday School, and showed her how to quilt and hook mats! Oh, it was downright shameful!

I walked up and handed her the bill, and said: "You were so kind and thoughtful to fetch

those things you thought that poor little orphan baby would need, that I wouldn't like to cheat you a dollar. Perhaps when you need some kindness done for you, you will know how obliged I feel."

I turned back then, and I didn't hear any more laughing, but before I reached the gate, Dick Gray had caught up with me and took all the blame to himself. He thought it would be a good joke, he said, and when the girls had bought or begged the things, he had drilled Nancy in her part.

"It was a shame, I see that now," he said, real honest and frank, "but if you knew how dull life is for young folks here at the Corners, I don't believe you'd grudge them a bit of fun, even at your own expense. And you must let me tell Nancy you forgive her, or she'll cry all night. She thinks a lot of you, Miss Wogg. We all do. Mr Jones told mother at the funeral what you had done for them all, and about taking the little shaver to keep."

I had no idea I could be talked over so easy, for my feelings had been hurt right sore, but Dick has a way with him, poor lad. He would have me let him come in to see the baby, and we found her lying there with her eyes wide

open, such bright eyes! She laughed as soon as she saw me, and Dick says she has such an intelligent look.

She is the best baby, and she's got the cunningest feet! I'd have felt real lonesome after Dick left if I hadn't had her for company, Hannah stayed out so late. I wish her face had a bit more colour. You can most see through her wee hands. I hope I can raise her, the sweet pet! but I'm so ignorant—not a bit like a real mother.

You'd be surprised how many people called the first weeks I had her, seemed like the whole district was interested. I guess it amused my old friends to see me fussing over her. I don't seem to have time for anything. The day I went to town to buy things for her to wear I had to get some one to mind her, and Nancy Smith came real willing. But bless you, I hadn't an easy minute till I got back! I missed church the first Sunday because she looked like she might be sick—the first morning service I'd missed in years, except once or twice for a treat when our pastor was away.

It alters everything having a child in the house, and Baby Annie is the clock everything is set by at our house now.

CHAPTER V

I'VE always thought it was so comforting to know somebody's praying for you.

It feels nice to know that every night, also sometimes mornings, when they get up early enough, some living being kneels down and, remembering you, says a good word for you.

I was that touched once when a person I used to know well told me in his own house, in the presence of his wife and children (only they couldn't hear), that he never said a prayer, never, without putting in, "God bless and keep Mary." He said it had got to be a habit long ago, when he used to go to prayer-meetings and picnics, singing school and bees, and walk miles and miles to take me home—and often as not, only to find some one else had got ahead of him.

Don't I remember the snow-drifts and the mud! There's nothing like it these days! The distance we'd go for a bit of fun, we didn't mind a five-mile walk, nor a twenty-mile drive

more than nothing at all. Our trouble was lest we could not get to go, for parents were strict in those days, and seemed particular who we went with. Besides, we all had work to do, and plenty of it.

The excuses that young fellow used to make to get to our place, and he was welcome, for our folks liked him. As for me, I liked him too, but not well enough. People blamed me some, but he said I'd always treated him fair. He didn't hold any hard feelings, and we parted friendly.

His wife is a trim, neat little mouse that looks up to him like he was the Czar of Russia, and he says he's a better husband to her for having known me when he was young.

That, and his telling me he prayed for me, touched me, but when on a bright Sunday morning as I sat in church, cool, collected and happy, and heard myself prayed for, out loud, before the whole congregation, I felt small enough to crawl into a mouse-hole, and hot enough to be burnt out of it.

I had never given it a thought, what an awful ordeal it might be hearing yourself mentioned in prayer in meeting, but from this out I'll know there's one thing *more* ministers have to bear than I ever thought of, and I'll

sympathise with them more than ever. They get it, most every time they listen to another person pray.

It was in the long prayer before collection and the sermon, and I was as calm as a summer day, with my elbow resting on the arm of the pew next the aisle, my hand over my eyes, my mind easy, when Mr Paterson began recommending one of our members for special grace and blessing — one, he said, who had burdened herself with the keeping and the training of the destitute and the orphan; one who, in response to a dying mother's prayer, had taken upon herself the care of a helpless infant; one who had taken up her cross cheerfully, uncomplaining of the discomfort and the trial; one who, like Martha, was burdened with many cares, and, like Mary, had chosen the better part. He spoke most feelingly about the unselfishness of this sister, putting it strong as words could do.

It was some time before it struck me he was alluding to me, but when he mentioned "the dying mother," and went on and on, my cheeks began to burn and my knees to shake, and I'd have gone under the seat, sure, only I knew I'd have to come up again some time.

I felt like I'd committed a crime and been

taken red-handed. I kept saying, "Oh Lord, forgive me! it's me he's talking about." Like enough, up above it would never have been known who he meant if I hadn't let on, but it took me by surprise, and I had to apologise.

When the prayer was through I was so flustered I tried to find the hymn in the Bible, and forgot to stand up to sing.

I wouldn't have caught anybody's eye for a good bit. I sit near the front, and after the benediction, I just stayed pretending I'd lost something down in the pew, and then loitered till the pastor came down from the pulpit. He shook hands so cordial, like he thought lots of me.

Then says I: "I'm downright sorry, but you'll have to take back a deal of that you said in your prayer."

"How is that, Sister Wogg?" says he, with his beaming smile.

"Because it's not true," said I, my voice all shaky. "It's not true, and I can't let on it is. I wasn't unselfish one speck. I've been wanting to have something belonging to me for a long while. I've been denying it to myself and everybody else, but when it comes to trying to deceive Him that sees the heart and understands you better than you do yourself, it's more than I can let pass by. You see how it is? I've been tired

of myself, and getting lonesomer and lonesomer these years past, and if my pride would have let me, I'd have taken some live thing to bring up long ago. But not being a marrying sort, I was afraid people would laugh and pity me, and say, 'Poor thing, she's so disappointed not to have children of her own, she's had to adopt one.' Naturally, I'm real fond of little ones, but I'd made believe I wasn't so long, I'd got to feel that way. But it was no trial to take the Jones' baby, and I won't pretend it was.

"Why, if you'd see me when I'm alone with her, how I hug and kiss her, and how, half the time, I lift her out of her crib and hold her all night; if you'd see how loving she is already, how she crows and stretches out her arms to me, you'd never talk about crosses and discomforts and trials. Why, she's the greatest blessing! All I'm afraid is, I won't be found worthy to keep her, and she'll be taken away. She isn't strong, but that sweet and good—I'm giving thanks all the time that I've got her. Forgive me if I've hurt your feelings, but I'm awful sorry you said those things, for you'll have to take them all back!"

I was never nearer crying, though crying isn't much in my line, and I stammered and stuttered so I could hardly speak.

We argued it out some more, but it wasn't a mite satisfying. He said he didn't see but what it was as much merit to do a good deed because it pleased oneself as because it was a duty. It seemed to make all the difference to me, but he was so set he wouldn't give in. He walked right to my gate without saying he was convinced.

I was so glad we had roast duck for dinner. I asked him in, of course, and he said it was his favourite dish, which pleased me, for he ate real hearty.

He said Annie was sweet and clever, but frail-looking. I suppose if anything happened to her, he'd call it Providence removing a trial. My little Blessing, it wouldn't seem like that to me! I'm fearing she's too good to live—but maybe not, there are not many who are, that's one sure thing.

It's wonderful the interest all sorts of people are taking in my little girl. On Monday there came a letter from Maud M'Gregor; she's a daughter of a lawyer in Hamilton who married my second cousin, and lost her five years ago—as high-minded and fine-spirited a girl, my cousin was, as ever lived, and I loved her much. I write to Maud, but haven't seen her since she visited up at the home farm, a

little romping girl, before I rented it. She's almost a woman now, and a variety that's strange to me—a high-flyer, her father calls her. I know she's been sent home from two boarding - schools and not been invited back. Her letter shows what she's like, sprawled all over the page, and such a pile of sheets. The letter ran :

“ DEAR AUNT POLLY,—Dad told me to write to you to say the papers are all right and the kid's your own to lambaste as you like. He says he's glad you bought back that property, but that you gave Jonesy twice too much for his equity. He says you can now fence in the street and plant potatoes in it if you like. He also says he wishes, if you were bound to saddle yourself with a daughter, you had adopted me. He told me to ask you wouldn't you please adopt an elder sister for the young 'un, and thus relieve him of my company. Pop is real tired of me, Aunt Polly-wants-a-cracker, he doesn't know what to do with I. He says I need a mother's guiding hand, and, my Polliwog, I'm dead afraid he'll *buy me one*. I've seen his eye on a likely-looking jade about my age, more than once. He misjudges me, he never takes me up right—and that's so bad for young rabbits. He's often cruelly plain with me, and

this very noon he was downright nasty. I've had a corn on my tiny toe for which I bought some conf—some corn cure. The wretched stuff took off the toe, but ah! it left the corn to me. I've been lame for days, and wore the Pater's patent leather pumps around the house. To-day he saw them. He says they're ruined. He says I've *stretched* them. Was there ever such a father? I want you to adopt me right off. I want to leave home and get back to Nature. I want to hoe corn and plant praties. I'd like to ride to town on a load of hay—I have the most elegant stockings. I'd like to work in the fields like they do in the Professor's love-story. I want to raise stock, horse radish, cowslips, coltsfoot, chickweed, or any meat and vegetables you fancy. Dear Aunt 'Polly-put-the-ket'—do, do send for me. I'm afraid something awful will happen Dad if he's bothered with me much longer. I'll rock the cradle, keep you lively, and if I don't wake up the Corners, may I never be known again as the wildest tom-boy girl in this hamlet.—Thine forever and after,

"MAUD M'G."

Her letter made me laugh, but I wrote advising her not to come. I also wrote her father, giving him some good advice. He's still a young man, poor fellow, and if he went

and married from a sense of duty he'd like as not make three people miserable.

A month ago if I'd got Maud's letter I'd have had her come, and she'd have laughed me out of adopting my Blessing. My own little one! I wouldn't be without her for the price of a farm.

CHAPTER VI

THIS summer's gone the quickest and been the happiest I've known since I grew up.

I've been that busy I've gone nowhere nor had visitors, Baby Annie and I just living quietly, getting acquainted and growing to love each other more and more.

She's that sweet and knowing, has got some teeth through, without being sick, and she calls "Goo-goo" to go out with me every time she sees my bonnet.

It's come the time of year for our Harvest Home tea-meeting. We have one every year for our church between wheat harvest and fall fair time.

So on Sunday morning, when Mr Paterson asked the ladies to remain after service, we all knew it meant tea-meeting talk. I stayed, a bit uneasy in my mind too, for an old friend had happened along the day before and was staying over Sunday ; and seeing he'd slept through

breakfast, I knew he'd be wearying for his dinner.

We ain't a really Ladies' Aid, though we do the work just the same, only don't get credit for it. Having no officers, there's always delay in getting started, and though we'd all been clacking like a flock of geese before, the minute the minister's wife took the chair and said the meeting was open, we all got as still as still, nobody having a word to say.

After a bit Mrs Piper (a peppery little body as ever was), being mad that the men had fixed on a date for the tea-meeting, got up and said she for one wouldn't do a thing, nor bake a thing. It was a strange thing if the deacons and the finance committee were to be let have everything their own way without even consulting us. We did all the work, and they only hindered or criticised. They needn't to put her name on any committees, for she wouldn't act, so there !

"Oh, we couldn't get on without you, Mrs Piper," says one. "For who'd cut the cakes?" Another says : "You'll have to get over it, sister, or we'll have the first failure in the history of the church," and so on. I didn't say a word, for I'd a deal rather work without her, she sets people by the ears ; but she soon let them smooth her down, saying at last she'd do what

she could, but she wouldn't slave herself to death, as she usually did.

After an hour's talk, doing nothing beyond deciding to use the same old tickets (there's no date on 'em) at the same old price, we appointed the same old committees, with Martha Shanklin and me to do the soliciting. I kind of like making people give, though I didn't seem too willing. I had to hang back a bit like the rest.

I got into trouble just before the meeting closed. I said as mild as could be: "Wouldn't it be better to appoint some one to handle the tickets and the returns, instead of troubling Mrs Stubbs, who just handed over everything to her husband?" (He is church treasurer.) I said this because everybody had talked and talked about it, how we could not get any account from her the year before, because as the money came in she just handed it over to Mr Stubbs, and we never knew who paid for tickets, nor who gave subscriptions, it being all in with the church funds.

Every one present had said what a shame it was, and I expected they'd back me up, but not one of them said a word except "Oh, Oh!" as if I'd accused her of being dishonest.

Mrs Stubbs made an awful to-do, resigning and sulking, and having to be coaxed around.

I was asked to withdraw the charge, which, as I'd made none, was hard, but I explained and repeated what I'd said, and she was appointed treasurer as usual, and was authorised to buy an account book at the church's expense.

It was very late when I got home, and Mr Pease—Joe, as we always called him—said he was hungry enough to eat the kid without mint sauce or apology. He's the queerest talking man I ever saw, never calls anything by its right name, nor ever says a word he means. He has a long, thin, sad, jaundiced face, lank black hair, a drawl longer than his long moustaches, and when he laughs you'd think he touched a secret spring that opened up his head in two halves. He makes his money being a lecturer and a funny man on a Chicago paper, and loses it patenting inventions that nobody ever wants.

He's no kin to me, but being raised in the township, and having once been after one of the girls, he seems to think we're pretty near brother and sister. Once every other year or so he drops in unexpectedly, and then I never hear a word of him until he drops down again.

He was holding Annie on his knee, looking hungrily at her, as if he'd take her by the hair and eat her like a radish. I didn't explain what

had kept me till dinner was served, then I told about our meeting after church, and he wanted to know all about it, and what we did at our "tea fights" when we had them.

"Why, Joe," says I, "surely you haven't forgotten the tea-meetings down in the little old church on the First Concession?"

"Reckon it's in my thinker locked up, but I've swallowed the key. You tell me about 'em."

"Why," says I, "all the members and friends make cakes and pies and doughnuts, which they take to the church and lay out on long tables. They cut up bread and meat for sandwiches, then they pay twenty-five cents each to sit down and eat. And all the people eat and eat, and we 'tend on them, and when they get done we wash dishes, set tables again, more folks come along, and so on."

You should have heard the way he laughed! I thought the top half of his head would come loose, he roared so hearty, and I couldn't help but join in.

"Oh, I remember all about 'em," says he. "I can see the old church now, the pulpit with a porch top, the big box stove in the corner, and the tin dinner pails hanging along the stove-pipes! I remember once being let melt the butter at the stove for the women to spread

the bread. I remember my mother helping, and hooking cookies for us boys. You folks beat all for sticking to things. I haven't heard of tea-meetings since I was a boy."

"We have them regular, every year, besides a free one for the Sunday School. Only we have finer things to eat now. Don't you ever have them in Chicago? How dull it must be for you!"

This made him laugh more, and he told me what they have done to "amuse themselves" in Chicago in recent times; but what they were up to now he daren't venture a surmise. "There used to be fancy fairs, pink teas, Martha Washington bazaars, kermises, rag-bag sales, German coffees, Dutch flower shows, Dolly Varden luncheons, fêtes of all nations, *haut ton* receptions, pork pie festivals, old Colonial banquets, but these have all gone out. They now pick people's pockets in newer and stranger ways—but, as of old, they don't leave any change."

I said I'd guessed they'd just like a good old-fashioned country tea-meeting, and enjoy it as much as we did. I never told him of the work and worry they gave the women, and how if we only knew a better way to raise money we'd be glad enough to do without them.

It was a weary day Martha Shanklin and I put in soliciting.

Martha struck me as acting oddly. She is sort of quiet and far-off—unless she's talking a blue streak—and sort of affected and silly. I don't mind her, though, we all have our weak-minded spells.

We began with Moses Grimstick. He's not a church member, but his wife is. He always goes regular and criticises, and he gives once in a while. He's the richest man in our congregation and the hardest one to tackle, and there's always an exciting uncertainty as to what you won't get out of him. We caught him in the front field shovelling off a load of manure.

"I'm too busy to talk to yous," he said, as I began explaining what we'd come for.

"It needn't take long for you to tell what you'll give," says I. "We came to you first, so you could set a good example to others. We're going to have meat and poultry, cut up, this year, as well as sandwiches, and we'd like some of your nice young ducks. They say you raise the best ducks in the township."

"'Township,' nuthin'," says he, "county would be nigher! But you don't get any of my ducks; can't supply customers, let alone get any for market. Ridicklous giving folks such

things to gobble up at twenty-five cents a head."

"Well, you see, Mr Grimstick, if we don't give good fare we won't get the crowd, and unless we raise a lot of money it just means an extra subscription, and I always think it comes easier giving stuff than cash. In raising money, you know, we always look to you to lead—you've been so prospered."

"Prospered, stuff and nonsense!—hard work and frugality, that's what I call it," says he, shovelling away like mad. "You can't—have—any—ducks or chickens," he jerked out. "What else'll serve ye?"

I suggested a ham, a hind quarter of lamb, cream, milk, butter; even a bag of potatoes wouldn't come amiss, as we were going to have them hot in their jackets. He jerked out "Naw," "Naw," "Not much," "Stuff and nonsense!" along with a shovelful of manure at each thing I mentioned. You'd think to give anything at all was like to kill him. At last he said he'd think it over, and we went off, smiling with our lips, but our mouths were terribly puckery inside.

A little way from the gate we met Mrs Gray. She is a Methodist, but comes to our teas and sociables sometimes, and to meeting now and

then. She asked where we were going, and then she offered right cheerful to give her "mite," if we'd accept it. She said she'd like to send a couple of rolls of butter and half a dozen pumpkin pies (and hers are *pies*), and that brought our courage up.

Take it all round we had first-rate luck, the ones that had the least to spare being generally the most ready to give. We always check over carefully, because some promise and get the credit for being generous—get it cheap, for they never send a thing. We got enough promised to feed a young army the first day, and by the end of the week our lists were so full there couldn't help but be abundance for all, even if they were more famished than usual.

I never had such bad luck as I had the morning of the tea-meeting, never. I've made custard pies times out of mind, and never did one curdle before. The best of eggs and good rich milk, most half cream (too rich, like as not), everything sweet and clean, and yet they turned out spoiled, not once but twice. I filled some crusts with plum jam, but that didn't satisfy me, as I'd promised custard, and I was upset.

I boiled a ham, roasted a goose, and made nubbies. Some folks are so ignorant they don't know what nubbies are, though everybody likes

them. They are nice light, rich little cakes, all lumpy on the top, with raisins, currants and peel in 'em. People will tell you they are like their drop cakes, but they're not, they're a lot nicer. Children will eat them by the dozen, and not get sick, either. I made near a bushel of them. By the time I was through I was that tired I'd rather have gone to bed than to the church to help fix. But I had to go, sure, and Hannah went with me to help carry a big clothes basket.

At the last minute somebody had changed our plans and decided to have tea served in the Temperance Hall, it being larger, and go to the church for the programme, which we'd always done it before the other way about.

There were few around when we got there, some men setting up the tables, a few children with baskets, and Mrs Grimstick sitting on the table she'd chosen for herself. It was the one in the middle nearest the platform, and which would likely be the one where the minister and the speakers would sit.

I don't ever care who comes to my table, so long as they're hungry, but I chose a pretty conspicuous one, right near the door into a room where the extra supplies of victuals are kept, and where we cut up the stuff.

Our table was pretty rickety, the legs being of unequal length, but Hannah was handy with a hammer, and got it steadied somehow. We mostly use white cotton for covers, unless those who like to bring their own, and I'd brought my Sunday best linen, a pretty centre-piece that Maud made me one Christmas, a bouquet, china cake plates, and plated knives and forks, and lots more. We were getting along well before the rush came, but workers soon began to arrive, all asking questions, baskets to be unpacked, everybody trying to help in everything and nothing being done.

I set Martha Shanklin checking over what came; Mrs Grimstick undertook to cut up and deal out the pies, equally, to each table; Mrs Piper was cutting up the cakes, and making a great to-do, not allowing anybody to touch one until the whole supply should be ranged out. Mrs Stubbs and Mrs Serum had charge of the bread and butter, and there was work in plenty for every one to do.

Being well on with my table, I took it into my head I'd go home and have one more try at the custard pies. We had most of the provisions set out on the table—two plates of meat and poultry, two dishes of celery, bread and butter, pies, lots of small cakes and cookies,

but as that wicked Hannah said, "devil a cake" would Mrs Piper let us have. I had a few words with her, but being in the right I got the worst of it, as is usually the case. So Hannah sat down to wait for the cakes and watch that no one snatched anything from our table, while I hurried home.

Nancy Smith was taking care of my Blessing; she's a real good nurse, and baby loves her.

She gave me a hand with my pies, which turned out beautiful without a speck of trouble.

I had no time to do much dressing, so slipped on my old black satin. It's not a bad style in front, but terribly old-fashioned behind, having a long straight overskirt back. The waist is most all hidden by my real lace fichu. It's a beauty, cost more than two new dresses would, but I've had it ten years and I'm still proud of it, always feeling well dressed when I have it on.

I had to hurry going back, as it was late; but it's hard to go fast carrying custard pies, a dish pan, towels, and a bottle of pickles.

I saw the people were beginning to gather; they're always early, mostly having made out with a scrap dinner at noon, so as to be ready for the tea.

I didn't want to be seen with my dish pan, so

I just slipped in the back way into a dark little entry that leads into the Hall, and being all tuckered out, I sat down on a bench that's always there, to get my breath.

I could hear the women talking and laughing in the cutting-up room, and much moving about in the Hall, as I sat resting in the dark, cool place, and soon I felt able to go in and work some more.

The tables looked lovely, and the pastor says to me: "Sister Wogg, the festive boards are fairly groaning with good things."

"There'll be more groaning than the boards, before they are cleared," says I, and we both laughed. It does not need to be much of a joke to make people laugh on tea-meeting night.

Hannah came up and whispered: "They wouldn't let me have no lemon pie for our table, but I've hid away a store of stuff for the second settin', and if yous want lemon pie, just let me know."

I tried to coax Martha Shanklin to exchange a plum tart for a lemon pie, but she wouldn't. She had several hidden away for the second table, but she wouldn't spare one.

Then the people, who had been laying off their things over at the church, came pouring

in; and while they were busy taking tickets and seating the crowd, Hannah and I had to scrimmage around getting tea and coffee and hot potatoes, that had been baked at a neighbour's.

Two young girls were helping us, and when we were ready to serve if there wasn't the minister at the head of my table, and three visitors with him from town, and the reeve and a lawyer from away off somewhere! I *was* proud, but I didn't let on, and never so much as looked at Mrs Grimstick. But, dear me! if I'd known how hungry they were she might have had 'em and welcome! Duck, ham, potatoes, and bread and butter went like snow melting, and when it came to the pies and cakes, we had to go for more over and over again.

The lawyer man said he didn't know there was such cooking to be found anywhere in the world, and they say he's travelled.

Once Hannah disappeared, and then I saw her coming hiding something with her apron.

"I've got 'em," she chuckled, "I've cabbaged two lemon pies."

"Good for you!" said I, in my excitement, and put out my hand for one, just as the pastor asked for pie.

"Here you are, and the best of its kind," I remarked, handing it right over his shoulder in front of him, and smiling back at Hannah, without so much as a glance at the pie.

"Hello, my dear Miss Wogg!" said he, "that must be what you'd call squash pie."

Then I looked, and everybody else looked; there was one big hearty laugh all round the table, and folks at other tables stood up to see what the fun was. There I stood with what was once a lemon pie—a big, soft, full lemon pie with lots of eggs frothed on top, it must have been; but some one had sat on that pie and mashed it out of all shape, and the egg and insides were leaking down.

I never felt so foolish. I was the only one that didn't laugh.

There I stood, holding it out at arm's length, like I was petrified. Then I said: "Let me catch the boy that did that!" and hurried out. I never went back till that lot had left the table.

There was a crowd of boys over in a corner, and before the next crowd got in, I made them all stand up with their faces to the wall. None of them were guilty. There's no disguising the mark a lemon pie makes. I had to feed the boys well to soothe their feelings.

I kept it in mind, and watched every boy I saw, but, seeing we had to wash dishes and set tables three or four times, I hadn't any time to waste. We were all too tired to eat any supper ourselves when it was all over. I stopped a minute to speak to Mrs Grimstick. "I'm real glad to see that your husband is better than his word. He reminds me of the surly man in the Scripture, who said he wouldn't go, and then went. Mr Grimstick refused downright to send a single duck, and then sent a pair of beauties. When a man gives more than he promises he ought to get special credit, and I'm going to thank him."

"Miss Wogg," says she, getting very red, "I beg you'll say nothing to Mr Grimstick. The poultry, butter, and eggs is my allowance for keeping the house, and I had him kill ducks for market and kept those two out for the tea-meeting. It was a deception, but it's my affair; it comes out of me, so please don't mention it."

"Certainly I won't," says I, and then talked real fast about something else.

To think of being married to a man like that, and I've heard folks say she was nearer than he is. I think those who have no men to bother with have cause to be thankful. To think of

having to burden your conscience, and be deceitful in giving!

Nancy said she wasn't a bit tired when I got home after the exercises at the church were over—speeches and singing, and such. Dick Gray was there. He had taken his mother to the tea, then dropped in and stayed with Nancy to help mind Annie, so Nancy said.

He went along when she did to see her home. I felt a bit worried. Dick has a bad name, and the girls ain't let be friendly with him. He isn't encouraged to go anywhere in the district, not that he ever tries, or seems to care. He had looked like a grown man at sixteen, a big, handsome one at that; and now was added the promise of as much black beard as any one could wish, only he kept himself shaved raw all the time. He has the nicest head of black hair, with just a suspicion of a wave in it; thick black brows, pale olive skin, and lovely, deep, soft, sad brown eyes. His mouth is like Tom's was, a perfect shape; and when he smiles, which isn't often, if you could believe any harm of him you're not like me.

He's sporty, and always was, fond of hunting, fishing, horse-breaking, racing. He's wild, sure, but he's got the name for everything that's bad, whether he's earned it or not. At school

he was the smartest boy at his lessons ever known, and he passed his last examination with the highest marks, and at the youngest age in the history of the county. He was set on going to college, but his mother wouldn't have him leave her—bound he should be a farmer, and she's made a desperate lad of him. I like him, but I ain't easy in my mind about Nancy. Not that either of them cares a bit for the other, but she might, if she was warned against him.

For one thing and another I'll long remember that tea-meeting. It was the best we ever had, and a pile of money it made, and the speeches were no worse, if some longer, than usual. Then there was another thing. When I was undressing, I hung up my black satin skirt on two hooks, as I always do, and there at the back, under the overskirt, was a great stiff patch of white and sticky wetness, the awfulest sight you could fancy. By degrees it dawned on me what I'd done! The pies must have been set out on the bench in the entry where I'd sat and rested, and it was I who mangled the lemon pie! Nobody shall ever know, but how to clean it would puzzle anybody. My saving way of never sitting down on my overskirt was a good thing that time, for I'd

raised it right up, then, when I stood, it hung down and hid my disgrace. I wished that pie had had less stuff in it. I felt like Lady Macbeth, but I didn't walk in my sleep; I was too tired.

CHAPTER VII

It's at Christmas time you miss not having folks.

It's then I envy people who are busy up to their ears with their little mysteries, making gifts that have love stitched into them, planning surprises that will be talked about at family gatherings years after, making sacrifices that they'll maybe feel for a twelve-month, and being so happy and so busy they haven't a minute for weeks at a stretch to gossip about their neighbours.

They're sometimes so busy they neglect their church, forget their sick friends, and let their duties take care of themselves.

How nice it must be to go back to the old home, with father and mother there to welcome you, and all the family gathering in, with their husbands and wives and little ones! To think of the getting ready, the packing of parcels, the joy of starting, and then, as you drive up, to see the door thrown open, the

dear voices calling and the dear faces smiling through tears. Ah me! to be mothered once more, how wonderful it would be! It makes me homesick for heaven.

I somehow can keep middling happy most of the year, but holidays try me. I'm always looking for something, and nothing comes, and it's lonesome.

I have my Blessing this year, thanks be, but I would so like some place to go where people would want me as badly as I want them. I wrote asking Neil M'Gregor to bring Maud and stay a week; to some other connections too, but it didn't work. They couldn't come; they told of all the good times they were going to have, but didn't say, "You come along with us." Never thought of it, likely.

Week before Christmas I went the rounds of my particular friends in the section to see what they were going to do with themselves. They were all busy and excited, full of preparations for going away or for feeding folks they expected—none of them bothered asking me what I was going to do.

At Shanklin's I saw Martha, and asked would she take Christmas dinner with me. She acted real astonished, said she couldn't

leave the dear ones on such an occasion. She's been queer for quite a spell. If I cared enough I'd find out the trouble, and straighten her out. She's huffy and odd, sometimes too gushing, and then cool—doesn't look at you when she speaks, has a far-off gaze and a general goneness. Whatever ails her has made her dress up neater and tidy her hair. She's given up wearing prunella gaiters, so it isn't a bad change on the whole.

I went home with a sort of despised and forsaken feeling, but after considering a bit, I concluded perhaps there were others⁴ feeling just like me that I could collect around me. I first wrote to Mr Jones to gather up his children (they're scattered here and there, all over), and all come and spend Annie's first Christmas with us. I said if he should come across any other people who had no one to cook for them to bring them, too, for dinner and tea.

I went to Mrs Paterson's, and asked her and the pastor to come and bring the family—which they have five children, and a maiden aunt, near eighty. They were so pleased it made me feel happy. I asked Mrs Gray and Dick, but Mrs Gray said she had never left home on a Christmas—and she couldn't spare

Dick. Dick looked as if he could have spared himself, nicely. He thanked me, and said perhaps he'd be able to drop in and see the fun during the day. I had better luck in the village, some that were halt and some that weren't—not my visiting friends, but people I've always known. Some of them were real poor, couldn't hardly afford a goose for dinner, and they promised to come, sure.

I can tell you Hannah and I had to tuck in and work for three days, and you'd think an army was coming, to see our pantry, and all the shelves down cellar too. We had pumpkin, mince and apple pies, jam and custard tarts, cookies and doughnuts (which Hannah calls 'em "fried holes"), ginger horses and snaps, cream puffs and sponge drops, fruit and jelly cakes, boiled leg of mutton and ham, roast ducks, chickens and plum pudding. All that we had done by Christmas Eve, and on Christmas morning we set three big turkeys a-roasting, not to speak of vegetables. Being up by daylight we had our jellies all turned out beautiful; celery, pickles and sauces all dished, and the tables set. The time we had fitting tables together to get them the same height, and getting

dishes enough for forty—and then, after all, if we didn't have forty-five!

I hadn't a chance to go to town myself after I'd planned my party, so I had to buy what gifts I could at the post-office store, where they keep drugs and stationery—and at the corner grocery, where they have candies and a few bits of toys for the Christmas trade. I could have wished a better assortment.

I had a hunt in the attic and store-room, and found buried treasures—mits, handkerchiefs, ribbons, and foolish things besides.

I had a bit of a cry over something I found in a dark corner of a trunk. It was in a paper-box with a picture on the lid. 'Twas only a bit of a book-marker, made of holey cardboard, with, "When this you see, remember me—Mary," on it. It was worked in green silk, and had a magenta ribbon on the back of it.

I made it for a Christmas gift for Tom, when I was a tiny girl. I bought the things and worked it in secret, stealing a minute whenever I safely could. I thought it was beautiful, and I tried to give it to Tom, but I was too shy. I tried hard, but I never could get up enough courage. I had it in my muff when I went sliding on the mill

pond. Tom happened along, and came sliding too. We were all alone, and he walked nearly to our gate with me, but I couldn't seem to be able to take my hand out of my muff. I cried about it when I went home. I was sent a message next day to the Grays', and Tom was there. I had it in my pocket. I had my hand on it and my mouth open to speak a dozen times, but when I tried my voice wouldn't work; and I acted so queer Tom thought I was mad at him, and he let me go back home alone. That Christmas was spoiled for me, and the sight of the little marker did make me sorry for the shy little girl I used to be.

I wonder if it's better to forget? Remembering seems to make us sad a deal oftener than it makes us happy.

Hannah has a funny way of giving things names. She called that Christmas gathering a "job-lot party." It certainly was noisy and merry when my job-lot came crowding in on that bright winter morning. Before ten the first team arrived with samples of the Joneses and their relations; and the first thing I saw was Teddy wagging his head at me. Then they came thick and fast, and when the parlour was too full to hold more, they went into the hall or

kitchen, or anywhere. I was afraid Hannah might "scat" them, for she had her own young man out there playing most mournful on a piccolo, and shuffling his feet so I'd have thought she'd go wild; what with that, and sizzling gravy and pots boiling.

The table did look grand in spite of being a bit lumpy where the joins were; but I pitied the one who had to sit where the legs came, for there was no room for their knees. Fact is they'd have done well to leave both knees and elbows at home, for though the table stretched the full length of the dining-room (which it should have been two rooms by rights, only I wanted it together, the sitting-room part one end, and the eating part the other), without room to more than scrooge by to get seated. That dinner table did remind me of the Judgment Day, it was such a promiscuous crowd—sheep and goats mixed, but mostly goats, if I'm a judge.

My little Annie was so sweet, sitting in her high chair, like a lily in a cabbage garden. Her father and brothers looked like they could eat her.

What a time they all had! They didn't stint the victuals, and never was there a better behaved, kinder-mannered, happier crowd, and

I don't remember ever feeling more contented than I did serving and watching them. And the fun there was getting them waited upon, and changing the plates! Hannah's young man helped wait, and she was real easy on him till she got him alone in the kitchen, and then he heard news.

The extra children at a side table were so good, and not a thing went wrong, except some cranberry sauce that landed on the minister's shirt-front. But that only seemed to make everybody merrier.

After dinner I let Teddy Jones distribute the gifts. They were in baskets, all ticketed; those for the women had even numbers, for the men odd numbers, and the children letters. Each one had a ticket, and Ted would draw a gift out of the basket and read the label. Then the person whose ticket matched would claim the gift. It made a lot of fun, pleasing everybody, mostly; though some of the presents didn't suit extra well.

Then the children had the whole run of the house, cellar, attic, and all; and the noise of them, and the way they ate candies and nuts, I'll never forget. The grown-ups sat in the parlour, had music and played games, and some of the babies cried. Annie got so tired she

tucked her head under my arm and clung to me, trembling.

I'd like to have had them all lie down, but instead they mostly went out to the barn to play with the children and wake themselves up, and I slipped away and put my baby in her crib in my room. I sat by her while she slept, watching her tiny white face, her hand curled up like a flower, her pretty hair falling over her wee ear, which was transparent, like wax. Mrs Paterson's boy, three months younger than my Annie, is bigger and heavier; and one of the Jones' relations has a baby just Annie's age, but twice as big, and that coarse and homely—her looks should have been saved for a boy.

Before dark some of my party had to leave, though they mostly all stayed for tea, and some all evening. I enjoyed my tea a lot better than dinner, and they all did good justice, though not so keen as at noon.

So ended a new kind of Christmas. It was a sure success, but I don't believe any one of them enjoyed the party half as much as I did.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN I find it coming on to the end of the year, it makes me think. A year isn't long, or doesn't seem so when it's gone; but it's a year and it's clean gone, vanished, never to return, and when you're over thirty you ought to know that it's bringing your appointed time a lot nearer.

Three hundred and sixty-five days, mornings, afternoons, and evenings, not to speak of the odd quarter of a day and the nights. And if you're a poor sleeper there's a deal of time to spend amiss, that you never think you'll be called to account for, in the nights—and all of them gone, every minute of them, days and nights, sleeping or waking, lived through and over with, and what are you the better for it, or what is the world the better for your having lived all through the year?

That's the kind of questioning I put to myself when I'm closing up my books, so to speak, before a new year comes.

I stand myself up in a corner and I start:

"Mary Wogg, Spinster, what good have you been these twelve months past? What have you been living for? Is there any one happier for your being let live all this year? Is there, now? Don't squirm and wriggle, but own up. You call yourself a Christian, don't you? Well, how do you prove it? You're a Baptist, a *regular* Baptist, so you don't hold with falling from grace, but what grace have you? You've a deal more faith than works, and more blessed assurance than modesty. You reckon strong on your calling and election being sure, but how do you know it won't be protested? Would anybody but your blessed baby be worse off if you were removed right off to the Crossroads Cemetery to the crowded family plot? Hannah would miss you, you say? But do you do Hannah any good, outside of making her wear flannels that tickle her frightfully, and paying her good wages? She works for her wages, doesn't she? She gives you good value even if you did teach her how, and overlooked some things that were none of your business. You're little of a hero and less of a saint, no wonder you're speechless! Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

I talk plain, generally, and don't keep it all for other people. I'm just afraid maybe I'll

be getting a name for having a sharp tongue. I'd rather be called a roaring lion, however, than have them say my bark was worse than my bite. That always makes me think of a noisy, slinky dog.

To put a sort of decent finish to the year, I went to the prayer-meeting the Wednesday night after Christmas. I go mostly, but not being what you call passionately fond of prayer-meeting, I can be stopped easy. If there's a backache or a threatening of rheumatics, they're apt to loom up on Wednesday nights. I've noticed that.

Our prayer-meetings are not right joyous, there are times when to call 'em dozy would compliment them. I go not expecting much, and I generally get it.

It was sort of mournful this time. They were mostly complaining of feeling cold and indifferent (which was true, like enough). They said they were not loyal to the cause, nor zealous in good works, and they prayed for more grace and spirit and more devotedness to the Master.

Members of the church were asked to stay after the meeting was dismissed, for the consideration of business. I stayed. It was a sad and solemn session, all about finances.

The treasurer wanted to know what was to be done. Something had to be done. Six months' interest on the mortgage would be due on the first, the pastor's salary was a quarter overdue, there was a new stove wanted at once, and the church would need shingling in the spring. All the tea-meeting money had gone for much-needed repairs and current expenses.

It sounded like blue ruin, for we're a small congregation without any wealth; and there was considerable grumbling and some fault found, besides talk of extravagance and so on, which didn't lift the load a mite.

I kind of expected the ones who complained of wanting more grace and less coldness to put their hands in their pockets to see wouldn't that warm them. But they just sat and looked glum.

I kept still as long as I could. Then I spoke. Women often speak in business meeting in our church, and any other time they feel like it, which isn't as often as you might think. I think I'd explode if I went to church meeting where the women are expected to keep silence, and only such men speak as are asked beforehand. It saves time, like enough, but it's not exciting.

I didn't stand up, but I spoke up. Says I: "Grumbling is all very good in its place, but it

won't pay our bills. It seems to be money that's needed, and that alone will help just now. It's not reasonable to expect to be warm spiritually, if we're cool with our cash. So I propose we take up a subscription and each give what we should—not what we think we can, but what we ought."

"Well," said one, who'd complained loudest of coldness, "what will you give, Sister Wogg?"

"If what I give will warm you, Deacon Serum, I'll double your subscription, whatever it may be."

There was a laugh at that, and the pastor rose and said, "Let us pray."

We don't feel much like arguing or multiplying words after a pacifying prayer from Mr Paterson.

Then a subscription list was passed around quietly, a committee appointed to see absentees, and there'll surely be plenty to straighten out all the tangles, and perhaps more. We all felt so good that when a voice piped up and moved that our minister's salary be raised fifty dollars a year, everybody voted for it, even the poor treasurer, who has all the worry and all the blame; and such a handshaking and happy-New-Yearing as there was after meeting I haven't seen for many a day.

I don't know what Deacon Scrum gave, but I really thought I'd hurt myself with my subscription, it was that big (and I heard others call me generous), yet when I added up my accounts the last day of the year, I found I had more money in the bank by quite a sum than I had the year before. I've spent more too, but when an income gets real easy and firm-rooted it grows without either weeding or watering. I don't spend much on myself, not having a fancy for fine clothes or fixings—when you have a good watch and chain, a pretty brooch, a best bonnet and dress, what more do you want?

I have great plans for Annie; I've started a bank account for her, for maybe she'll want to go to college and get learning—like I longed to do, but never could. She'll sure want pretty things, and perhaps when she's grown up we could cross the ocean and see strange lands.

I wonder if real travel is much better than my dreams? I've had such grand dreams for years and years, and I've never so much as seen the sea.

We'll need money when Annie grows big, but just now I could spare some, if I could pick on a body I am interested in that I could help without hurting. Most of my connections are

well-to-do, though some are reckless living and like to come to want; but I'm not saving up now to help them then. I feel genuine shame to have been hoarding; it's an awful discourager of righteousness. I don't do my duty, nor spend my time nor my money well, and as for "doing the best I can," and hoping to go to heaven for doing it, as some say they do, I ain't one of them.

I don't do my best. I'm light weight and short measure, and I'm sorry for it. But what makes me the sorriest is that I ain't sorrier.

And like as not I'll be no better next year. But I hope I'll try.

CHAPTER IX

THERE was an accident right outside my front gate on New Year's morning.

It was a clear, bright day, stinging frosty, three below zero, and no snow. Dick Gray was down the side line driving behind his black colt that he sets such store by, the colt going, the beauty, more like a thing with wings than four legs.

I watched for them coming back, and saw something was wrong. The colt was galloping wildly, the sulky rocking from side to side, and as I opened the door to run out, I saw a wheel strike against a tree box, Dick pitched out, and the colt off with part of the wreck.

Some men up from the corner helped Hannah and me carry Dick in. We thought he was dead, but he came to before the doctor got here. He struggled to get up, wild to go after his colt. He wouldn't lie down or let us do a thing till word was brought that he had been caught and hadn't a scratch on him. Then Dick fainted, and we had him at our mercy.

He was cut and bruised past belief; his back and side looked like fashionable wall paper, but keep him still we couldn't. I had him most a week, petted him all he'd stand, fed him well, and made much of him.

The evening before he went home we had a bit of a talk sitting beside the kitchen stove with the door slides open. I let him smoke, though I hate and despise it most cordial, but I wanted him to be happy; also I wanted to get a hold on him.

"I'm so glad the colt wasn't hurt," said I. "You'd have felt bad that you'd speeded him if he'd come to harm, and you so fond of him."

"He's fond of me too," returned Dick. "He knows I wouldn't harm him. When the mare died I took him and raised him by hand, and I've slept in his stall many a night. A strap broke when he was going at top speed, and I hadn't time to quiet him before we struck. We're the very best of friends; he's the one thing I care for in all the world."

"Don't say that, Dick, even in jest. There's your mother, and never a mother loved a boy more than she does you."

"Does she, indeed?" he sneered, with the black look he mostly uses dropping down over his face. "She shows it oddly. She thwarts and

opposes me in everything, even the smallest. All I have from her is moans and groans and tears, and a stubborn resistance to everything I want. It's my opinion, she hates me."

"My dear, my dear, that is not so. She loves you dearly. Why, it was common talk all your boyhood days how she indulged and spoiled you; and her doting pride in you could be read in her face when she looked at you."

"That's ancient history. I was a child then, to be petted or reproved as she pleased. Now I am a man, with a man's will, and she would break it or me, she cares little which."

"Dick, you've got off the right road; somehow, you've come to misunderstand each other—"

"Oh, we understand each other perfectly," he said bitterly. "You knew my brother Tom? Tom has always been my hero—he died to save me, a little useless chap. He was a fine fellow. I seem to know him well, and would like to keep a tender memory of him; but Tom has been thrown at me all my life until I could curse him in high heaven. I am contrasted with him—my ways, my looks, my actions: 'Tom never would have done so and so'; 'Tom would have been a comfort to his mother'; 'Tom would never have been a

sport, a horse jockey, a friend of drunkards and gamblers'!"

Dick's words came tumbling out fast and fierce. I was afraid to speak a word. He looked hard at the fire for a while, and then began again, more quietly :

"I'm not proud of myself. I'd be ashamed of the useless life I lead, only I care so little—and I have it in me to be so much worse. I made some good resolutions as the New Year's dawn came in, which shows I am still young. I did some little things for my mother. I wished her 'a happy New Year.' I tried to be genial at breakfast, and when I came back to the house after doing some chores, my mother said : 'It was about time you turned over a new leaf.' There was a sneer in her voice that raised the devil in me. I harnessed Black Prince, blind with rage—that was what caused the accident, really. If I'd had my eyesight, I'd have seen that everything was right before I started. My mother came out as I was driving past the house and called to me. She raged at me, ordering me back, forbidding me to go, threatening me. As I drove off, she cried out: 'Would to God you had been killed with Tom! Better to be childless than have such a son.'"

Dick had never raised his voice, he was quite calm, but his face was white, with a deadly whiteness, and his lips were drawn into a straight, bitter line.

“She didn’t mean it, Dick; you know she didn’t mean it—it was the bitterness of her spirit escaping in wild, unconsidered words.”

“They were bitter, but they weren’t unconsidered. They have been long in her heart; she has had trouble many a time keeping them from her lips.”

“I don’t think you or I can tell what’s in the heart of a mother, boy; I think that’s beyond us. You’ve taken different roads. You’re all criss-cross with each other. You’ll have to let the past go, and start afresh. Your mother’s had a sad life, and trouble has soured her, warped her toward you, perhaps, more than in any other way. She was a happy-looking, pretty woman a few months before you were born; and when your brother and sister died of diphtheria within two days of each other, she went nearly mad, it was just a miracle you were born alive. It was pitiful how she poured out her love upon you, lavishly—your father thought sinfully; you were the apple of her eye. Then Effie married, and died so sadly, and Tom was killed. Your mother

clung to you as her only comfort until your father died."

Dick grew restless. "Do you think it's news you are telling me? I've heard it all, and more, scores—yes, hundreds of times. And it has all been my fault. Before I was born and since, every sorrow and trouble can be traced to me. If mother could have nursed the children they would not have died. If I hadn't been sick and kept her home, she could have gone to Effie and saved her. If I hadn't been in the bush, Tom would be alive to-day; and as for my father—— I'm tired of it. I'm hardened, calloused, desperate. I could hang myself for pure spite, but that I'm determined to live out my life and die fighting."

Annie woke up. I lifted her out of her cradle, put her in Dick's arms, and went on with my sewing.

"Why don't you leave home?" I asked, after a silence.

"I promised my mother I'd never go without her consent. I thought I could make her let me. It was after I passed my exam. expecting to go to college. I loved study and wanted to be a doctor; I'd always said so, and mother never had said a word against it; but it appears

when father was dying he told her to keep me to the farm, to keep a curb on me and make a farmer of me. He left everything to her, nothing, not a cent to me ; I wasn't mentioned in his will. She has never let me have a cent of money since my father died. She bought everything for me—hats, ties, everything, until I rebelled and would not take them. I have kept myself somehow since I left school, breaking horses, selling game, betting, anything. I begged, I implored her to send me to college. I promised to repay every cent I cost her, told her I'd go to ruin if I stayed on the farm. Nothing I could say would move her. My father had told her my soul would be required at her hands ; he had said her indulgence was destroying me—he had ever been harsh and severe, a morose, unreasonable man. Then I ran away. I was gone for weeks, and when I came back my mother was so white and wan she frightened me. I began again, coaxed, pleaded, argued ; she was as adamant, but so wild and strange I thought her mind was giving way. I promised then I would never leave her without her consent, but I would never do farm-work as long as I lived. That's how it has gone on. I have urged her to let me go in for stock

raising, but she won't spare money even for needed improvements. She knows nothing about business, but she will not trust money matters to any one, only saves and scrimps and works herself to death, letting everything go to destruction. She's too busy keeping me dependent upon her, and driving me to perdition to notice anything else. And she has not troubled even sending to ask after me, since I was hurt."

That's were the sting was. He had escaped death narrowly, had been lying ill within a few hundred yards, and his mother had not come to him. I had wondered, but nothing had been said, and now the hurt feeling had impelled the poor lad to speech, and he had unburdened his heart.

Much that he had said was news to me. Mrs Gray was reserved and kept no company, but she dressed well and was generous in giving. Dick got all the blame for the neglected, mismanaged farm.

I sewed a bit silently, watching his handsome, set, defiant young face, as he swayed Annie to and fro on his outstretched hands. Then I said quietly: "When I made up my accounts at the end of the year I was sore ashamed because I've been saving out of my income—interest, and so

on that I'd set apart to spend. My principal has been growing, being good investments, but I hold it's sinful for a lone woman to save out of spending money. It's quite a little lump too, some thousands (not all from last year), and it has been troubling me a deal. I've made it a matter of conscience—of prayer, too—I want some good done with it. I want to put it in some bank to your credit, Dick, for you to go to college and be a doctor. I think it's the grandest thing in the world to be a doctor—a good doctor, I want you to be that, Dick."

I didn't look at him, I couldn't have seen anything but a shoulder if I had, he had edged himself away so his face was hidden. He didn't say a word. After a while I began in a soft, low way—I never believed I'd have said it to a living soul,—“I'd like to make a little confession to you. I never told any one else, never. I used to be fond of your brother Tom. It seems like I am fond of him yet. That's why I've always been so interested in you, so sorry for your mother. I might have had a right to advise you if he had lived, but he died saving you, Dick. I'd hate to think he had saved you only to have your life a useless mistake, to have you wrecked before ever you leave the harbour, without ever a struggle on the ocean of life. I'd

like to help you, as if you were my own young brother."

"It's too late," he said, in a hushed way. "I've got a bad name, and I'm banned. I've been relegated to the companionship of horses, dogs, and such like. I'm a by-word of wickedness, my name used to frighten naughty children with. Old Smith threatened to beat Nancy if he ever caught her going out to meet me again. Not good enough for Nancy Smith—Martin Gray's son! Without a friend but bar-room loafers—except you. My father said I would finish in jail or the gallows, and with harshness and sneers tried to drive me into vice. I had to be wicked, and I'm so hardened I can't reform. There's no way out—it's too late. Thank you all the same. I'll go to bed now, and if I ever dare to pray, I will pray 'God bless you, Mary Wogg.'"

He went home next day.

I didn't say another word, but I felt set as a rock. Opposition always did have that effect on me. You might call it the impulse of a moment making Dick the offer, seeing I'd never so much as thought of it before, but I call it an inspiration, and surely inspirations are sent for good.

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I've been troubling some about Annie, seems like she doesn't thrive nor grow. She seems not to ail any, never frets nor cries, but she looks unearthly white, and her eyes are too bright.

She calls, "Mam, mam," every time I come into a room, then laughs about it, and says it over and over as if it were a good joke. I never in my life saw such a knowing child.

I've had the doctor drop in friendly-like to give me any advice he could, and when he was here tending Dick he said so long as she took her food and digested it, I needn't sit up nights worrying.

She seems not to like her bottle very well, the last day or two, eats a bit from a spoon, but so little. I drove down to the doctor's house and left a message, seeing they didn't expect him back before late afternoon. Passing Gray's farm a thought came to me, and I drove in and asked Mrs Gray would she go home with me; being as she knew so much more about children than I did, I'd like her opinion.

She came right willingly, and Annie being in a sound sleep she consented to stay to dinner, and afterward held her in her arms while we talked. She encouraged me—told me about how all her children had had sick spells when they were teething, and how for months before Dick

was a year old he'd seemed to be pining away, and had gone to a shadow.

Then I saw my chance. I told her how frightened I was when I saw Dick stretched out by the road-side lying like one dead. "It reminded me so of Tom," I said. "And I thought of you, and how awful it would be to lose another son by accident, and at about the same age too. He looked so like Tom did in his coffin. I never saw how like he was before. His eyelashes were long like Tom's, and laid on his white cheeks with a little upward curl, and you couldn't but think if he opened them they would be deep dark blue, instead of brown. It was long before he spoke, but almost his first words were: 'Will some one tell my mother I'm not hurt?' I never saw any man so patient, and his bruises were just awful, all broken and scraped. I hope there'll be no bad effects."

"He does not seem well," said Mrs Gray. "He is so quiet and strange, hardly leaves his room, and eats just nothing at all. I see his light burning half the night, and he reads, reads, poring over those books on horse doctoring. I burnt the whole set once because he said he was going to be a vet. : seeing he couldn't be a doctor for humans he would do what he

could for animals. He shall not be a vet.—a godless, unsettled lot they are."

"I've only known one or two," said I, "and they weren't right steady, to be sure, but they might have been a lot worse men if they'd taken to other work. I think Dick is right to be studying anything. Better anything than drifting."

"Mary, he's breaking my heart," Mrs Gray burst out, her reserve giving way. "I have loved him better than anything on earth, and I see him going down to destruction, and can do nothing to stop him. Martin blamed me for his bad ways—told me my doting fondness had made him the undutiful, reckless, headstrong boy he was. No one knows what it has been to me to be stern and strict with him, trying to atone for my foolish lenience when he was young. But it is no good, all I do but seems to harden him. He neither fears God nor regards me. He is a lost soul."

I stopped her right there. I said some hard things about people with pin-head brains daring to stand in the place of the Judge of the whole earth. I told her she was trying to measure Dick with a rule that would be small for a Hottentot. I said Dick wasn't a bad boy, nor undutiful, and if he

was reckless, small blame to him! She'd been treating him like an ordinary perverse boy when he was a genius. Never was there such a student in the history of the township, and every obstacle put in his way to keep him from his books. He was born to be a scholar and a leader among men. Of course he was wild and reckless. Better that than broken-spirited or contented with husks. Nelson and Wolfe and Napoleon and Milton and Scott, would have been desperate or morose or cranky if they'd been kept doing farm-yard chores instead of being let go off to fulfil their destiny.

"See the way Dick has of always getting to the bottom of things," I said, ending up, "never satisfied until he finds out what their insides are made of, and how they work. He's a genius, and you ought to let him go where he can find out what he wants to know. Send him away from home, Mrs Gray. Give him up and you'll keep him. Give him a chance to grow and you'll have good cause to be proud of him in this life, and, please God, in the world to come, too."

CHAPTER X

I HARDLY knew how happy I'd let myself be, lately.

I've been real comfortable and contented. I haven't been troubled in mind or body. I've been laying plans and saying to myself, "Mary, you're well-to-do. You have lots for yourself, and something over. You've got something to love and some one to love you, some one that will grow, and you can play with and tend and make happy, and who'll care for you when you are old and helpless."

And I'm helpless now.

Everything's changed. Annie's sick.

Perhaps if it wasn't for sickness and sorrow we'd be right willing to house-keep in this wearyful world for ever and ever. It seems like we belonged here and owned what we've got, as long as all's well and happy. Then sickness comes swooping down upon us, with death hovering near, and it seems nothing's solid or lasting, we're of no account in the

universe, the foundations of our world keep crumbling and we are slipping down, down.

Baby didn't seem so very sick, but the doctor came often. He didn't laugh at me when I asked would she get well. And I expected he'd have laughed.

I don't know as I had doubts, I just know I followed his directions and I kept a-praying.

Yes, I prayed hard. I never left off. Whatever else I was doing I was praying all the time. I kept saying over and over: "Oh Lord, don't take her. Whatever else You do, leave me my baby!"

I knew it was selfish. I was right sure of it, but I persisted, and kept praying to have her life, at all risks. I didn't seem to think whether it would be for her good to be taken or not. I never once said, "I'll leave it to Your judgment and Your mercy, as You must know best." What I wanted was to have her. I didn't want to be left alone after I'd grown to love her so—why, she was the only being in the world that I out and out loved! There were unwanted and uncared-for children a plenty that wouldn't even be missed—but Annie was my heart's delight.

I tried to get resigned to take it either way, but I couldn't.

I thought of how this was a hard world for girls, a disappointing place at best, where you never get what you want while you want it, but it comes unasked when you've no use for it. I thought of how Annie's own mother was afflicted and how daughters are heir to their mother's ills, and perhaps she'd be more delicate than even the run of girls nowadays. I thought maybe I couldn't make her happy or keep her good, and maybe Aggie could train her better in heaven—— It was all no use. I kept on praying over and over: "Don't take her, Father. Leave her with me a while longer, anyway. Don't forget me in this, how lonesome I'd be—oh, twice as lonesome as I was before she came."

I knew they weren't Christian prayers nor right prayers, but I felt real human and so dreadfully in earnest. And I knew God was listening.

So I hoped while I feared, kept the kettle always boiling, and did what I could.

She didn't seem so very sick, although I was so frightened. But one day she grew worse. I'd been holding her all morning, because she clung to me and seemed to like it. She dropped asleep often, and in her sleep she'd start and give a little moan. Once she

cried out, and I could feel her tremble, so I talked lovingly to her, and tried to wake her. She didn't wake easily, and her breath came hard.

Once she woke up suddenly and looked at me with wild eyes, but she saw who it was and smiled, and when I bent my face down to her she stroked my cheek with her wee hot hand.

Just as it grew dusk she started up with a queer, muffled cry. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were like stars, but so strange.

She didn't know me; she was frightened of me.

It began that way—a little fever, slight chills—then the cough began to bother her. It seemed as though a knife went right through my heart when it shook and tore her, and she'd look up at me with her big eyes so imploringly, her tiny hand clutching at her chest. She seemed to think I could raise the weight off her lungs, if I'd a mind to. And when her poor little stomach wouldn't keep the medicine, which she so awfully hated to take, and she looked at me so reproachfully, it did seem as if I could not bear it.

It's so much worse for a little baby to suffer, not being able to tell about it, or understand that it's for their good we're putting on

mustard plasters and fly blisters, and torturing them in every way.

I didn't have any one to help me in the nursing, though lots offered. I just stayed right beside her, or held her in my arms, fighting for her life, and Dr Graham, and another doctor from town, helped all they knew. I couldn't give her up—I couldn't. She was so dear to me, my heart was bound up in her.

But she suffered so ; it tore me to bits.

In the early morning, after the fourth night, she 'most had a convulsion trying to get her breath after a coughing spell, and her little hands grasped me, and her wild eyes besought me to help her. And by and by she got too weak to cough.

There was something kept raising in her throat, would come so far, and she hadn't strength to raise it. It made a horrible rattling sound.

I couldn't stand to see her suffer so ! How it hurt to see how hard it was for her just to breathe ! I held out as long as I could, but at last I gave in. I went down on my knees and cried aloud : " Father, take her away from me. I can't help her any. I'm willing to give her up. Only take her quick, for it's killing me to see her suffer."

I was willing she should go. I said it then, and I say it now—I don't go back on my word, even to my Maker. If she hadn't suffered so, I'd never have given in, so it wasn't any credit to me—only a different way of being selfish.

A load seemed to have fallen from me: it didn't seem as if I had any further responsibility. It came to me that I'd been wicked not to let Hannah have word sent to Mr Jones, when she asked me wouldn't he like to see Annie. All sorts of thoughts came, accusing me, and I was crying soft-like to myself, the first tears I'd shed, hardly conscious that baby breathed easier and was lying asleep.

I was so thankful.

I went to the window and watched the dawn-light creeping up through the darkness like a grey mist. Then a wee streak of light came close down at the end of the east field, showing a dividing line between the dark clouds and the snowy ground. There was a struggle, for only step by step would the army of darkness yield, but attacked front and flank it was pressed backward, harried, and with a sort of glad rush light at last prevailed.

It seemed to me something like the fight between good and bad in our hearts—a picture of how some day evil will be vanquished and

done away with, and only good will be left—and not a trace of the struggle to show where the battle ground had been.

Hannah came creeping in just as it was full day, and I told her to send for the doctor, and to have some one drive off for Mr Jones. I saw there was a change in Annie, even while she slept. I was not weak or excited, but quite collected and calm, giving directions, attending to everything, but as if I were somebody else, as if I were in a dream.

Baby woke up. Her suffering seemed almost gone. I was glad, though I knew she was slipping away from me.

The doctor came, and said it wouldn't be long.

Her father came, and two of her brothers. One of them was Teddy, but he didn't waggle his head. Hannah let some of the neighbours in; they had been kind, bringing chicken broth, and such like—they were so sorry, everybody was fond of my baby!

When they were all gone, I told Hannah not to let any one else in. I wanted my little one to myself. I took her from her crib and held her. I talked to her, pouring out all my heart, telling her how I loved her, how the years would stretch out so lonesome, how I'd

want her and long for her, and she would have gone away.

She sort of dozed off as she lay on my knees, while I watched her breath coming fainter and fainter—all I had loved and lost seemed leaving me, over again, with her passing,

Then, then there was a sound—I can't tell what it was like—but I was frightened, and I called for Hannah. She came in, crouching, and knelt at my knee. She was crying. I never saw her cry before.

My baby's blue eyes were open now, but not the same eyes, they were big and bright and glorified. She looked up, but away off beyond us, the brightest light breaking over her face, and such a wondering, rapturous smile. She put out her arms as if she saw heavenly angels, and wanted them to take her. I put my face down close, saying, "Baby, baby, Annie darling," but she neither saw nor heard—she'd hear or see me no more on this earth. Then the light began to fade, her eyelids drooped, there was a little restless struggle as if she wanted to slip down from my lap.

That was all. She breathed a minute and was gone.

CHAPTER XI

EVERYBODY was so kind, but it's a wise person who can touch a bruised heart without hurting. To say nothing at all is safest, I suppose ; that's the kind of sympathy that suits me best, anyway, but folks are made so strange and various—what helps one would make another suffer a lot.

I wished they wouldn't say she was better off, and I'd had a load of care taken off my shoulders. I wished they wouldn't say she made "a lovely corpse." She did look like a marble angel in her best white dress and the little pink and white jacket I'd knitted her for Christmas. Nancy Smith had a calla lily out, and baby's fingers curled round its stem, and on her breast lay the white hyacinths and Chinese lilies that we'd watched together peeping out of their green sheaths in the sunny dining-room window.

I didn't like her to be put under the snow. Your love for a baby seems to be more a love of the little body than your love for a grown

person is, for you are all the time loving what they will be as well as what they are. Oh, if I could only have done something for her ! but I couldn't, not one thing, and so I wanted my dead buried out of my sight.

On Sunday at church Mr Paterson made mention of my loss in his prayer, and his discourse was almost like a funeral sermon, and 'most as hard to bear. I kept from crying only by saying over, all through, "Edinburgh after Flodden," which was a piece I used to speak at school.

I wish I didn't have so much time on my hands. I don't know how to get through the days—I, who used to be so busy. I can't read, somehow, and I was always so fond of reading—I've forgotten a toothache over a book. I don't half sleep, either, and I wake up, often, from a doze thinking Annie needs me. I wish I could make myself tired, so I could sleep. I don't rightly know what I used to do with my time before my Blessing came to me. You wouldn't think a baby that I had such a little while could have got such a hold on me. And people say, "It wasn't as if she'd been my own." She was my own, and she was all I had. "Be Thou gentle with her, Father, I gave her up to Thee!"

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I was trying to write letters one day when Mr Jones happened in.

He said he was driving by on his way to town and thought he'd give me a call. He sure is a melancholy-looking man, and he complained of feeling lonely. Said living here and living there wasn't living at all. He said unless a man had a home he'd better be dead.

I agreed with him. I thought he had.

He couldn't help but smell dinner cooking, but as he didn't offer to go, I asked him to stay.

He talked a lot about the boys, how they were distributed about, promiscuous, among his folks, but there wasn't room anywhere for Teddy. He had been hauling him around wherever he might be stopping or boarding—Mr Jones, being a fruit-tree pedlar, knows all the farmers round about, and he stops just where he happens to be ; but now being spring was coming, and he'd be busy, he'd had to put Ted out with a farmer as hired boy. And Ted was unhappy : overworked and under-fed, and sometimes knocked around a bit.

I didn't like to hear that. It hurt me to think my Annie's brother was abused and had no home. I didn't say anything to Mr Jones, but after he'd gone it kept worrying me ; I

couldn't help but think how Teddy had seemed to love Annie and made more of her than any of the others did ; and how she did enjoy pulling his mop of hair when he was here on Christmas, and how they both laughed over it !

It just made me think perhaps it wouldn't hurt me to be a bit kind to him for baby's sake, seeing he was her brother, and being a boy there was no danger of my getting fond of him. I never could abide even the best of boys, and he was the queerest-shaped, oddest-looking, and strangest-acting boy I'd ever seen.

My cousin Hiram (he's a far-off cousin) lives neighbour to the man where Ted is hired out, and I wrote Hiram asking him to get the boy and bring him to my place for a visit. Then I went on writing my letters, the last of them to Dick Gray, and it was a hard one. It took me a long time, but this is what I said :

“ MY DEAR DICK,—I have been making enquiries about what college expenses and such ought to be, and I've put some money to your credit in the bank, and here's the bank book. It ought to do you till you take your degree, and maybe a bit over to start you after, if you're careful. You can draw it as you want it, for it's yours. I don't want you ever to pay me back, but when you get on in life, if you can put a

like sum away to help some other ambitious boy to get an education, why, pass it on.

"I don't make any conditions, but I want you to know that I trust you and I am sure you will be successful, and, much better than that, a good man as well. Your mother will consent to your going if you ask her to do it for love of you. She does love you—never doubt that. Perhaps she will let me be friends with her when you are away. I hope you'll be off at once. You can be studying or hearing lectures even though you can't properly begin your four years' course until October.—Your loving,

AUNT POLLY."

I thought Hiram might bring the baby and Maggie with him when he drove Teddy over, but he didn't. I like Maggie, though she's no kin to me, being of German extraction, and I knew she'd be sorry for me, having lost her fine little boy last fall, the next youngest. She has five left, and is like to have as many more if she keeps up with the rest of her folks.

When I saw Teddy I felt I'd done the right thing, for a more miserable-looking little chap you never did see. He was thinner and looser-hung than ever, with longer arms and neck, and a bigger head with more hair on it. His clothes

were wonderful for scantness, and that poor! and such a woe-begone bit of a face with such hollow, hungry eyes!

You just should have seen Hannah gloat as she fed him, filling up his jacket till the buttons flew.

Hiram is odd, but he means well. He was talking about what a gap it left when the little boy was taken. "We've a good long family left yet," he said, "but we miss Hans. There's one size lost, which spoils the set. We're like a ladder with a rung broke, useful still, but there's an open space that's hard to get over. Yes, one of the steps is gone, and they were a perfect climb before, from the baby up to young Hiram—a gradual, even rise."

It wasn't a very touching way of speaking of his grief, but he felt it as much as the ones who say: "My life is a perfect blank. I can never get over it, or ever be happy again."

The first week Teddy Jones was here was the hardest to go on living I'd known for years. You can't be always feeding a boy, and after he was full he did seem most dreadfully in the way. He'd sit and stare at me, and when I'd look at him round would go his head in a wild waggle. He never more than sat on the edge of a chair, and would put his legs through the

bars and catch the back bars with his toes. He pulled his finger-joints till they cracked, and, if I'd had nerves, he'd have got on them, sure. As it was I felt I'd like to scream.

He didn't bother Hannah a bit; she talked to him or "scatted" him just as if he were a cat or a human, and he cut kindling, carried water, and shovelled snow for her. But it never took him long enough, and back he'd come to stare at me.

He asks her questions too, but to me he never says anything save, "Yessum," or "No-um," and seems scared to say that.

I sent Hannah up to town with him to get him clothes. I told her to get all kinds, whatever she saw, as nothing could come amiss in a wardrobe that had no beginning and was all ends.

To me he looks worse in his "Fontelroy" suit, as Hannah calls it, than he does in the navy blue sailor suit with the white braid and brass buttons. His blue jean jumper looks a deal more natural.

So now he's started in again to school, where he went before his mother died. He hadn't a word to say about it, but I guessed he'd had an exciting time by the way his hair stuck up when he came home the first day.

Out in the kitchen I could hear him telling Hannah what happened, and I was relieved when I heard him say: "You kin bet I licked him good."

And Hannah said: "That's right, allus let drive at 'em whatever size they be. I hate a man as'll be sot on."

There was her young man at that blessed minute sitting in his stocking feet, with a paper und'r his chair for fear he'd muddy her clean floor. She had made him pull off his boots and leave them outside the door. Hannah's been extra hard on him, I can tell by the way he blows his piccolo. When she won't let him talk, or snaps him up when he does speak, he blows a tune that dismal it fairly sets me wild.

Peter Snider comes three times a week, but weeks at a time Hannah won't so much as let him in. He's a harmless chap seemingly, has red hair, but not enough of it to make a body uneasy. He does odd jobs for farmers, and hostles at the tavern, and plays in the band—such as it is. He never drinks or smokes, and if he chews a straw it's as far as he'll go.

"Honest, Hanner, honest now," I heard Teddy say, "would you be a soldier if you was a man?"

“Would I? Wouldn’t I? I would if I was half a man, I would if I was the teeniest, weeniest bit of a man. It’s all I can do not to be one, woman and all. And why I ain’t off with the soldiers now I can’t tell you.”

“What for?” says Ted.

“For why? Cos why. Cos I loves ’em. If I heard the band a-playin’ and spied the boys in red come marching along, I’d up and after ’em. I’ve done it once, and I’d do it again. There’s nothing like the red coats for drivin’ the girls crazy. But they must be red—none of your black or blue ones—and just the sight of them and the sound of the drum and you’d see no more of Hanner.”

A long, long wail from the piccolo set the pans shivering on their nails and showed that Peter was taking notice.

“Now, Peter Amos Snider, you’ve reached high enough for one night,” said Hannah; “you leave the notes on the top pantry shelf alone and play us a jig. And you’ve got your heels off that paper. Was ever such a man let loose in a decent woman’s kitchen? You’ve got holes in your socks. No, you needn’t to try to hide ’em. Why don’t you get ’em copper-toed? And while they’re tinkering them just get your parts of speech brass bound—you ain’t bold

enough for the likes of me. I can't abide 'em 'less theys bold."

I'm a bit afraid Teddy being there makes her harder on Peter, having an audience buoys her up. If Peter suspects that, there'll perhaps be a little boy missing some day from our side line.

"Can't I shut the door, Hanner? Miss Wogg'll hear," Ted said in a boy's shrill whisper.

"You let that door alone; don't you know the devil never comes through an open door? I don't shut myself in with nobody, not me! A bright light and an open door will do more to keep a man decent than a white ribbon will; and factory unders and butternut stockings will keep a girl modest when the law and the Gospel won't."

A wild, excruciating shriek from the piccolo, an apologetic, "I didn't mean to, it slipped out itself," from Snider ended the music for the night.

"Just one more like that and I'll take an axe to your blow-horn, and put it out of its misery. The notion you have of torchuring a poor thing as can't help itself!" said Hannah with fine scorn.

"When are you going to bring me them pigeons you promised?" asked Ted.

"Oh, I'm layin' for 'em," said Peter.

"Don't you go for to trap or steal pigeons to give away!" exclaimed Hannah. "If you wants to take what ain't yourn, why, take it and keep it, or eat it; but don't go for to think you can do evil with one hand and good with the next. No, sir, 'taint pious to give any little boy a present that you hook from somebody else."

"Well, I got to have some pigeons or something," said Ted, in a lordly tone. "Why don't yous keep hens?"

"Missis had to give 'em up, much as she wants 'em, and with our fine poultry yard and all. She won't keep 'em cos it's such a joy for me to kill 'em. If I went all trembly and unwillin' every time we wanted to cook a chicken, she'd say 'Poor Hanner!' and keep on keepin' 'em; but seein' me gloat every time I sneak out and pull one off a perch, all sleepy and unspectin', and curl my fingers round his collar and come in smilin' over my happy memrys, she can't abear to have 'em."

"What would your 'happy memrys' be over, Hanner?" asked Ted.

"Why, it always minds me of the joyous day I last killed my grandmother. And now it's time you were in your bed, Mr Ted Jones.

And, Peter Amos Snider, if you don't bring up all your holey socks and all your torn things for me to mend by to-morrow night at eight, you needn't come here any more with your ear-piercer."

If I could read, I wouldn't hear a word they said out in the kitchen, but seeing I can't take in the sense even if I read it over ten times, I can't help but hear. And much good it did me!

CHAPTER XII

I DIDN'T quite know how tired of everything I was till along in March, Neil M'Gregor, Maud's father, wrote for me to go down to Hamilton to see him.

He said he wanted to consult me about Maud and things in general, but when I got there I found all he wanted was to get me away from home for a change. I was grateful to him, for home had got that tiresome I could hardly bear it.

He lives in a fine house, and has a house-keeper so much finer than I, that I felt right sorry for her.

Maud was away in Toronto at a Ladies' College, taking up only a few branches of such things as she could well do without—foreign tongues, piano-playing, painting on china; and dancing, too, I don't doubt.

Neil seems happy and contented enough. He's going in for local politics, he says, and was never home except to eat and sleep. At

meals he read the papers, and I never could wait up to see what time he got in at night.

He took me to some concerts and lectures, and to his Scotch Presbyterian Church; he had his friends ask me out to tea, and I went to an "At Home" once, and nearly had the clothes torn off my back, there was such a crowd.

Besides, the housekeeper took me to every store in the city, where she tried on hats she didn't want and coats she didn't mean to buy.

The weather was sunshiny mostly, but with an edge on its temper, and the breeze bored into every hole and corner—you'd be surprised how many holes and corners there are even in a body that isn't anyways thin. I'd hate to be called fat, fleshy or hefty, but it's a sure thing the slimness I used to have is well hidden.

I enjoyed my visit—I'm right sure I did, but the best part of being away is your gladness to get back home.

Cousin M'Gregor made fun of me, coaxed me to stay longer, but I'd taken a sudden fear that maybe Hannah would have a "good streak," and try to house-clean before I got home, and nothing would keep me. If she took to

rooting out my bags and boxes, cupboards and closets, I couldn't pretend to be pleased, no matter how hard she'd worked to surprise me.

It seemed longer going back than it did going down, and I got tired of looking out of window seeing fields and houses and bush rushing by, the few discouraged signs of spring, the patches of snow in the fence corners. I got to thinking and thinking, and from being glad I was near home, I got to feeling afraid to go back.

Life looked dark and hard and tiresome.

I wondered could I make up my mind and try to get a bit fond of Teddy Jones.

He was a boy, and boys haven't any attractions for me, and never did.

He wasn't a bad boy, and would maybe be better for some one loving him and trying to improve his talk and his manners.

It seems as if I must love somebody or something.

We were always a loving family, before I was left all alone, glad to be doing for each other, giving up our own will and our own way, and spending ourselves for those we loved.

I knew my need, and seeing Teddy was the only thing around, I thought I'd have to try on Teddy.

The nearest station is four miles from home,

and, as I wanted to surprise them, I hadn't sent word, so there was no one to meet me, and no one I knew around when the train got in.

It was getting dusk as I got to a friend's house, and asked could they let some one drive over with me. They said they would lend me a horse and rig after supper, not before. They were pressing, so I stayed.

It was quite dark when I got started, and my old Sam, blind of one eye, and living only to eat oats, couldn't have gone slower than that big, lazy nag. I was afraid Hannah and Ted would have gone to their beds, but when I came in sight of the house it was all lighted up bright, upstairs and down.

I drove in with as little noise as I could. The gate was open wide (I didn't like that), the stable and barn doors were open too (I liked that less), and that mule of a horse wouldn't go into the drive barn no matter how I coaxed and shook the lines. I got out to lead him in and ran against a bar, across the doorway, which caught me just under the chin (and I liked that least of all).

I unhitched him and was leading him into a stall that is always kept empty for chance comers, when I tripped over a rope swing and went headlong into a pile of hay. Being afraid

to go further in the dark, I tied the nag to the rope and left him to clear away the hay.

“This is what it is to have a boy around!” thinks I, and if I could have said, “I told you so,” to somebody it would have done me good. I stalked on through the back shed, not caring what noise I made, and as I went kept knocking against and stumbling over pails and kettles and obstructions that had no right to be there.

Then suddenly a sound as of a fiddle came to me, also a squeaking like Peter Snider’s piccolo, also shouting and laughing and goings-on that had never been heard before in my old maid’s paradise.

I went out onto the back veranda and tried to open the kitchen door, but finding it locked I knocked loud and angrily.

There was a sudden silence. Then a whisper: “They’re back again. Now all be ready, and we’ll charge ‘em.”

Then I pounded and called, and if I was ever madder I’m glad I’ve forgotten when. “Open that door this minute, or I’ll know why! It’s Mary Wogg,” I called.

“Oh, it’s you, is it? You’ve come back once more, have you? All right, Miss Wogg, we’re ready for you. We’ll Wogg you!”

There was a big laugh, the sound of feet

moving slyly up to the door, where I was pounding and pressing hard, while I called : “Open that door, will you ?”

Then I heard Ted’s voice say : “Now, boys, all ready—charge !”

The door was thrown open, and I burst in, and a shower of hot balls fell over me. They were sticky balls, and most of them stayed. I was about blinded, but I could see some, and I saw a crowd of the most astonished boys you ever saw in your life.

I pulled off my gloves slowly, standing there in the doorway, saying nothing, but keeping my eyes on those boys.

Not one of them moved.

Then I began to pull lumps of soft taffy off my face and my shawl (which I’d borrowed for the drive home), keeping up my freezing, scornful look.

But when I got one off my left eye and tackled another that was in my front hair, and looked at the scared faces of the boys, all daubed up with molasses and drying sugar, and their hands all full of taffy balls, they did look so funny, and my hair pulled so that I couldn’t keep haughty another minute. I had to laugh, and laugh I did, hard, and the boys at first gave a snicker and a giggle, then came an

explosion, and we all laughed together, a fair, straight roar.

I couldn't have thrashed the whole crowd, much as I might wish, so probably laughing it off was the best way I could do.

One clear look around showed me they'd been having a sugaring off. There were dirty pots, pans, saucers and plates everywhere—an awful mess. I spoke to such boys as I could recognise under the smears, passed the time of day (or night) with Hannah's young man, hiding behind the stove, and nodded to a starved-looking stranger who stood against the wall, hugging a fiddle.

Then I walked through and upstairs.

I didn't notice Teddy or Hannah by even a glance.

Hannah followed me upstairs, a lamp in one hand, and a pail of hot water in the other.

I asked her what she meant by turning my house into a taffy shop, and me away; what sort of an example was she showing to that motherless boy Teddy; and how could she stand by and see them pelt me with taffy balls on my own threshold, and laugh when I couldn't pull them out of my hair!

She made a noise, you couldn't tell whether

it was more a snicker or a whimper, and then explained.

Teddy had been working in the sugar bush with the man that rents my farm, and he'd given him some pails of syrup for his pay, and Ted had asked all the boys he knew to come and sugar off. Snider had come along, all "unbeknownst" to her, and brought another gentleman who had been fiddling for his board down at the tavern. Then two big boys, that Ted hadn't invited, kept coming, first to one door and then to another, bothering them, knocking and saying it was me. They made up their minds they'd pepper them with sugar balls if they came again—and that's how I got it.

"Not a bit of your bread have I give 'em," said Hannah, in rising excitement, "not a crumb but Ted's sugar and some milk, that we've got more of than we can use. They hain't made no muss nowheres but in my kitchen, and it'll wash. And to my mind, the people that streaks in like a cat by moonlight is allus apt to get as much surprise as they gives. Surprise! I don't hold with no surprises! I likes things done regular and open."

She'd have cried, if she'd been the crying kind, and I saw she was sorry.

I told her to go down and give them all some cake and apples, and I'd be down when I'd washed, but, bless you! when she got there, not a soul was left, not even the fiddler; and when I got down, Ted was in the sitting-room reading a lesson book.

I looked at him, and his lips began to pucker, as if a smile would like to come (his mouth is so like Annie's), and he stood up and said: "We're awful glad you're back, ma'am. Hope you ain't real mad, for we did have the hunkiest fun!"

Then I kissed him, like a fool.

He's made a gymnasium of the drive barn, a shooting gallery of the loft, has two pigeons and a skinny brown rabbit, so my troubles are like to continue and increase.

I wish I had more of a natural taste for boys.

CHAPTER XIII

SOMEBODY'S said somewhere that it's what you never do you always do sometimes, and it's quite true.

I'm positive if I'd been told the week before that I'd have our Ladies' Aid here (which isn't a Ladies' Aid), to a rag-carpet Sewing Bee, I'd have said: "You don't know your Aunt Polly."

I wasn't feeling like having people here, nor going anywhere, besides which I don't hold with Bees, and I hate rag-carpets. I feel dull and dead. I have the hardest work to get myself off to church; the least sign of rain on a Wednesday night will keep me from prayer-meeting, and more than twice I've gone out to the barn when I've seen people coming, so Hannah wouldn't have to more than white lie when she said I was out.

I haven't felt pleased with myself, though; I don't think I amount to much, and it's borne in upon me that I get worse as I get older

and homelier—which ought not by rights to be so; for when you haven't youth or beauty, and ain't clever, you ought at least to be growing in grace.

It's awful just not to be anything at all.

One afternoon I was out taking the air along the main road, when I thought nobody would see me. It was a bright day overhead, but that sloppy underfoot my skirts were wet before I'd gone fifty yards, and outside Mrs Scrum's if I didn't go plump into mud and slush over my boot-tops in front of her gate.

She saw me, as I stood on one foot and shook the other, like a turkey with chilblains, and she opened the door and shouted to me to come in. And when I got in, she took off my hat and cape, and made me stay to tea.

I didn't want to, I felt as if I really couldn't; I resisted hard, but you'd be surprised how much I enjoyed it! Everything tasted so good, she seemed so glad to see me and was so cordial, and Mr Scrum wasn't back from a trip to town.

She's a great worker, is Mrs Scrum; knits the thickest socks you ever saw and the coarsest, and is destruction on crochet quilts. She showed me a lot, and then unrolled a rag-carpet which she was that proud of she beamed all over—and she's not built for a beamer.

I admired it all I could and keep my conscience from sudden death ; it was wonderful ugly even for rag-carpet. I asked her did she like it so quiet-like (I didn't say dull), and she said that was the style now—all drabby - grizzly - greens. I said I was old-fashioned and liked a bit of bright, and that I had a whole bagful of bright pieces—reds, pinks, blues and purples, that I'd been keeping from the moths for years, and hadn't found a use for them yet. They were such-like things as red flannel drawers, cloth petticoats, old merino dresses, old garibaldis that were too worn or old-fashioned to give away, and I'd ripped them up and washed them, and there they were !

Her eyes all brightened up, and she said, wouldn't I donate them to the Ladies' Aid Mission Circle, that had lately taken to meet once a month to sew for the heathen ?

Mrs Scrum is terribly interested in heathen always ; I suppose, maybe, on Mr Scrum's account.

I'd have known all about the sewing, only I've been so uninterested in the church lately ; but she said they were making rag-carpet now, and had loads of dark, but hardly any bright, and mine would be just the thing.

I told her, yes, the heathen could have them, and welcome; but what they would want of rag-carpet on their icy mountains or their coral strands beat me.

"Oh, you're always so funny," said she. "We make the carpet and then sell it, and the money goes for missions." Then in a wheedling way she added: "We *were* going to meet at Shanklin's this Thursday, but Martha's laid up, and I was just wondering wouldn't you like to have us to your place?"

I wasn't wondering a bit, I knew—I knew well I wouldn't like to have them. I wondered at myself, though, when I finally said: "Well, you can come if you like, you can have it given out at prayer-meeting; but don't let anybody bring any victuals, for I won't have them."

It's been the custom for all to bring something, and the hostess only to provide bread and butter and tea, but I most cordially don't like having other people's cooking on my table.

So that was how it happened.

I never take much part in Mission work, except at collection time, for the black heathen seem a good piece away, while we have so many white, or hit-or-miss heathen right around us, needing to be missioned—not to mention out in our new districts where people just like

ourselves are all hungry for the Gospel, and no one to preach it to them.

It's home missions my heart is in, but I don't begrudge anything anybody can get out of me for the foreigners.

That Thursday was such a fine, warm day, and they were able to go out on the veranda to tear rags, for which I was thankful, for Hannah and I had most ruined our backs getting the whole house swept and garnished—the garnish being mostly tulips. Such heaps of tulips, red, white, yellow and lovely striped ones, and so fragrant, the whole house sang a spring song.

The members came at two, twenty of them in all, Martha Shanklin among them, her cold being better. She sure does look spindling, but she puts on airs enough to drive a wind-mill. She minces, she primps, and she is so die-away I'd enjoy shaking her. She sat with her hands crossed in her lap most of the time and her head tilted up, but her eyes glinting around to see if you're noticing, like a cat that's stolen the cream.

She didn't join in the talk, nor seem interested, but looked as if she thought her mind was taken up with far finer things. She answered in a far-away, patronising way, when

she was asked a question, and once when some one asked her if some rags they were sewing weren't a right pretty colour, she said: "They're as lovely as a poet's dream."

"'Poet's dream,' rubbish!" said I, not being able to stand it a minute longer. "You do talk and act too softy-tofty! 'Poet's dream,' indeed, about purple merino rags! As if poets' dreams were different from other people's dreams. It gives other people nightmares, like enough, reading some of the trash poets write. 'Poet's dream'! I have heard that folks sleeping on an empty stomach dream about fine things to eat—so perhaps poets have those kind of visions. But purple rags—huh! Tea's all ready now, friends, so please all drop work and wash your hands."

Most awful piercing yells made us all hurry upstairs, where Mrs Scott's baby had been put to sleep on my bed. I thought it must have rolled off and been killed, or next thing to it, but, bless you! there wasn't a thing wrong. He had just wakened up and wanted his mother to know, that was all.

She turned to me as she tried to hush him—squirming and yelling like a steam-tug, he was—and remarked: "You know what babies are, don't you, Sister Wogg?"

"Not that kind—not boy babies," I answered.

She sat down with him close to my dressing-table, and he began grabbing at everything within reach, like a lawyer. To save my breakables I took him up and hefted him. He was a load, for sure, but I said I'd carry him down for her.

At the table Mrs Scott held him, but not half tight enough. He mussed himself and his mother all over with everything on her plate; made Martha Shanklin, who was sipping her tea with her little finger out pointing at the north star, tip it all into her lap; got his fist full of juicy plum pie and held it out for Mrs Grimstick to taste, which nearly set her crazy—she was on the other side of him. She never had any children, and had on a light fawn dress.

Mrs Scott let him spoil all the stuff he liked—she is the easy, good-natured kind of woman who always has lots of children, and lets them rule her even in their cradles.

She worries very little how they abuse her things, and none at all how they destroy those of others. I've seen her sit and smile while her two biggest boys played tag on my parlour sofa, and after I'd lifted them down she watched

them punch holes in my new wall-paper with a jack-knife.

I never feel like thrashing the children, but there are times when I'd like well to take a stick to her, and I never felt more like it than just as we were leaving the table when she let the baby throw one of my lovely china fruit plates down to the floor, breaking off a gold leaf from its edge.

After that she laid him out on my lap, and asked me: "Wasn't he a fine boy?"

"Fine?" He was big, for a fact, if that made him "fine."

He looked like a nice pinky pig, fresh scraped, and his bald white head looked like a bladder of lard. You couldn't see a mite of a neck on him, nor a wrist, nor an ankle—only a mark as if a thread had been tied tight around to show where the head, the hands, the feet began, and the fat had rolled right over and hidden the thread. Such rolls of round legs, no more shape to them than legs on a snow man.

He raised a tune, which wasn't a hymn, every little while, and what with nursing and bottling, walking and jiggling him, his poor mother's arms must have ached. And she seemed to think it would be a comfort to me to be let hold him!

I hope I am not getting to dislike people who have living babies.

After tea we sat down to sew again, and there was gossiping and joking back and forth, as there's apt to be among a lot of women who know each other well, and one of them mentioned Mr Jones being seen around the Corners pretty frequently, and another said she'd seen him driving into my place the Saturday before. This made several of them make remarks in a teasing kind of way, and Mrs Piper pointed her finger at me, saying: "See, she's actually blushing!" and they all laughed.

"If I'm blushing, it's for you, not for myself," I made answer. "Mr Jones has a good right to come to see Teddy as often as he likes. I don't want the boy to forget his father, nor his mother either."

"He's picking up wonderful," said Mrs Grimstick. "He has a new hat and a rakish-looking red tie with flowing ends. It's a sure case of out hunting."

"Quite natural he should be looking out for Number Two," said Mrs Serum.

I hadn't waited that long before beginning to get warm, but now I boiled over, saying quite sharply: "I think it is the unfairest way to talk about a poor desolate widower, who is

trying to bear his loss as best he can. He has to go about and speak to folks—not being either blind or dumb. I don't believe he has a bit more thought of being married the second time, than Martha or I have the first."

They all had a hearty laugh at that, and cried, "Oh, oh!" and Mrs Piper said: "Surprising things happen sometimes, but I'm sure I've heard some one mention what a suitable match it would be, Sister Wogg—so fond of his baby as you were, and taking Ted and all."

"Well, suitable or not, let me tell you I would no more think of marrying Mr Jones than he would of asking me. You ought to know me well enough to know that. I hate such gossip."

They all tried to apologise and say they were only teasing me—all except Martha, who sat looking far away out of the top panes of the window, with her head on one side and her thimble tapping the table. She seemed as much taken up with her own thoughts as a bird trying to make up its mind to fly south—a languishing, sentimental look.

"Why, I declare there must be some truth in it, or why should you get so mad?" laughed Mrs Piper, who is always ready to say one word too much; and they all joined in, tittering.

"You must think I've lost my reason," I said, as hot as pepper. "Why, I'd as soon think of marrying old Jacob Switzer as Mr Jones!"

Martha, from being so far away, came back by lightning express, and jumped up with a red face, exclaiming: "Do you mean to insult me, Polly Wogg?"

"No, indeed, Martha," I answered, "not that I know of. I wasn't thinking about you, and if you'd been here instead of up aloft you'd have heard me say I would no more marry Mr Jones than I would Jacob Switzer——"

"When you insult Mr Switzer, you insult me," said Martha, rising on her tip-toes, and looking as nearly majestic as she could on her five feet no inches.

"What's the matter with the girl? Why should I want to insult either of you? It's no insult to say I wouldn't marry a man, just by way of illustration, as it were—though I do think it's poor taste to talk about such things at all. As for insulting Switzer, I've thought a lot of him always—since ever he came a tow-haired, good-hearted German and worked hired man for us at the farm. He used to draw me to school on a hand-sleigh, when I wasn't higher than his knee, and was that kind to me! I taught him to speak English, and to spell over my lessons

in the first book, and right well I liked him. A well-to-do, good provider he's been to two wives, but you all know he makes his boast that he's out-looking for a third!"

Everybody knew, and nobody better than I, for he'd asked me to marry him more times than three, in the last year—which was why his name came to my tongue so readily; though nobody knew that but myself.

"I resent your remarks," said Martha, and she looked as if she'd cry. "I wish you to know that Jacob Switzer, J.P., and I are engaged, and I beg you will make no derogatory reference to a gentleman who honours me with his affection, and whose name I have promised to bear."

"Why, bless your heart, Martha," I cried, as joyfully as I could, my breath being taken away with surprise, "why didn't you tell me before? This is the very first hint of it I've heard. I've been worried about you; I saw something was wrong, and this is what ailed you?"

"I have not changed in the least."

"Yes, you have, Martha. You've been playing all up among the small black notes and listening to nothing lower than the celestial choir. Small blame to you, either. Keep it up just as long as you can—don't you come down

one step—even though we can't help but miss our old friend Martha."

I got her alone a few minutes upstairs, and she said she'd been meaning to come over and tell me, and would I lend her some patterns.

"I'll lend you anything I've got, Martha," I said. "I'll be glad to help you all I can, and I hope you'll be very happy."

"In my new sphere of life I shall not forget my old friends," she returned loftily; "whatever advantages of wealth, refinement, and culture my position may bestow."

I laughed as I said: "Don't forget that it was your own sensible, plain, everyday self Mr Switzer must have liked, and not your new, airy graces which he would in no way understand. He'll be a good husband, and I think you have chosen well to take such a good-tempered, easy-going, well-off man."

"Yes, I know *you* think so," she declared, with a toss of her head. There were all kinds of insinuations in the tone.

I laughed again, but I can't say it was either very hearty or deep.

CHAPTER XIV

“I HATES engaged people,” snapped Hannah.
“They beats all for being snifty and notiony.”

This was said to the empty air, just after Martha had left the kitchen, where I’d been giving her a lesson in making puff paste.

’Tis no wonder, really, that engaged girls are so generally disliked. There’s no comfort living in the same township with them, they are that hard to get along with, and upsetting.

First, it makes them conceited, with a tendency to the vain adorning of their persons; next, they grow top-lofty and indifferent toward their folks, and their old friends; and the last stage comes when they take to wearing their old clothes, grow selfish and self-seeking, laying up for their new home, and losing all interest in the old one.

That’s been the way with Martha.

She used to be a hard-working, unpretentious girl, slaving for her people, a bit untidy and discontented, and more than a bit romantic,

but particularly civil-spoken and pleased to be noticed.

All winter I've noticed how she's been taking pains with her looks and her clothing—making the best of both—but now the day is set she's gone back to her oldest and worst. Not a ribbon will she wear, nor a garment that is fit even to make over; she's so shabby she's a sight to see, being even saving of her hairpins.

She's taken to running in day-time or evenings, just as pleases her, these past weeks, but she is so crotchety and unreasonable she pleases me not.

I've borne with her, and helped her with patterns and cutting out—besides picking out stitches and doing over again things she can't get right. To see her table linen hems would make you weep! My patience has been wonderful. I know, because I ain't patient by nature; I've worked for every last bit I ever use.

I've borne a lot, but when she takes a patronising tone with me I have to take her in hand.

I've given her cooking rules by the dozen, showed her how to make cream soups and omelets, pop-overs and corn muffins, fricassee this and scalloped that, croquettes and

crumpets, jellies and charlottes, not to speak of plain pies and cakes; but when she asked me did I know how to make *entrées* and *soufles*, *fricandeaux* and *frappes*, I gave up.

“And if I do,” said I, “what’s the difference? I’ve taught you fifty things that you’ll never want, already. Jacob Switzer won’t want any of your flyaway dishes—he was raised on plain sausage and saur kraut, and that’s what he’ll ask for now.”

Entrées indeed! he doesn’t know what an *entrée* is, unless it’s crackers and cheese—he’s almost fancy in his plainness, is Switzer—and as for the Shanklins, they are noted all round the section for how little they put on their table.

“If I were you, Martha,” I went on, “I’d give up the idea it’s a fine-lady contract you’ll be taking in hand. You’ll have plenty to do with, but there’ll be no style, and plenty of old-fashioned hard work, and a man to please who knows just what he’s marrying for. If you’re tired sewing come out to the kitchen now, and I’ll show you how to make corn meal mush and potato soup.”

However, I quite miss my mark when I try to reduce her transports, she simply thinks I’m jealous. You might as well preach caution

to a person sliding down hill—after they get a good start they can't stop to listen until they get to the bottom. Then's the time to talk: you can sit down beside them, bruised and broken, and lecture all you like; they can't get away from you!

Probably I can do Martha more wholesome good after a while, for now the powers of her mind are fixed on making a web of cotton cut out more things than it conveniently can; together with making embroidery and insertion and tucks match on all three garments, and getting the ribbon bows all of the right shade of baby blue. Mature green would suit her better, if the truth were told.

Poor girl! she was so distressed because the narrow Hamburg edging for one didn't match the scallop of the wide one for the other. It didn't comfort her a bit when I said it wouldn't be more than a couple of months before she'd be glad to go back to plain white cotton, if not factory; especially if she did her own washing, as Jacob's other two have done.

It had been her aim to have everything in dozens, but I persuaded her to come down to six; and she took my advice, mostly because she had to.

I helped her, and I gave her my sympathy.

She came day after day for a long time, and then suddenly she stopped.

I didn't mind, although I wondered; for I was busy with spring cleaning, early gardening, getting clothes ready for warm weather, and woollens out of the reach of moths.

I took the air around my own place, and saw few people but Mrs Scott, and she's what you might call a constant dropper-in; and when taking a walk, I'd go alone down the side line. Spring ought to be joyous, but a cloud seemed to hang between me and the opening buds and springing flowers; I wasn't feeling right, nothing seemed worth while.

Then something happened that made me so miserable I looked back on the weeks that were gone as if they had been full of bliss.

I've been keeping Teddy more with me after school and evenings, not wanting him to like the kitchen too well. I've watched him at his lessons, helping with his sums; told him stories of early days in Canada, about my school-days, and every smallest thing I could remember about his mother. I told him how anxious she had been about her children when she knew she was going to leave them, and how she prayed they might be truthful and honest boys, and make good, faithful men.

He didn't give me any trouble; he seemed always happy, and he was losing his awkwardness when he was alone with me.

His birthday was coming along pretty close, and, besides buying him some useful things, I'd bought him a pocket-book with a diary in it, and a knife with three blades, a gimlet, scissors and file in it—a truly wonderful knife.

"Teddy," said I, one day, "which would you rather have for your birthday, some money to put in the bank or a new hat?"

"I'd rather have a bicycle," he answered, without thinking a minute.

I reasoned with him. I said bicycles weren't meant for the country where the roads were all ruts and the horses were afraid of them; they would stunt a boy's growth and make him bow-legged; it was harder work to ride them than it was to walk, and deadly on the pants; and they weren't nice anyway.

"Well," he returned, with that independent air he sometimes puts on, "when I've saved up enough I'll buy one for myself," and off he goes, whistling, with his hands deep in his pants' pockets.

I felt sorry I'd spoken about it, because I did want to please him.

I took out the wallet from the drawer of the

table beside which I was sitting, and looked it over. It was a beauty. It had a calendar in the diary, a wide place for bills, a pocket for coppers, a safe place for change, besides cubby holes for cards and tickets. I put in some silver, some postage stamps, some fish-scaley cards with his name printed on them. Then I took out a five dollar gold-piece to put in the secret pocket, and was writing on the front page of the diary, "For my dear boy, Teddy, from his loving Aunt Polly," when there came a knock at the front door.

I hurriedly hasped down the pocket, slipped the wallet into the drawer, and went to the door with the pen in my hand.

I nearly always answer the door myself, unless I'm expecting company. I like to go, because then I know who it is much sooner than if I let Hannah go. She'd always rather do it, being curious to know who 'tis, too, but she's slow getting a clean apron on and her hands washed, and I'm generally there by the time she is ready to stand by the hall door to peep.

I went, and it was Martha—Martha Shanklin, dressed up all in news from head to foot—new gloves and umbrella, new boots and

ribbon, and a hanky that rustled so it would cut your nose for newness.

She did look nice, but that serious, there wasn't a smile about her anywhere.

She didn't offer to shake hands, but handed me a card, and thinking she was collecting for something, I read it: "Miss M. J. Shanklin," and in a corner some little letters written.

"Thank you for the card, Martha; but I knew it was you, the very first sight, though you do look extra fine, I must say."

She bowed with her head on one side and her lips pursed up, fluffed out her skirts to show the silk frills underneath, and sat down on the edge of a straight chair.

"Here's your card, Martha," I said, offering it to her; "you'd better have it."

"Oh no, you keep it, Miss Wogg. It's a P.P.C. card, you know."

"I thought it was pasteboard," I said, pretending I didn't know what she meant; "but if you'd rather, I'll keep it, of course, seeing you'll need new ones pretty soon with 'Mrs' on them. I'll put it in the plush card bag Maud M'Gregor sent me at Christmas. There ain't many in it; here, where I know everybody, visitors don't leave cards unless

I happen to be out, which I seldom am."

I was tug-tugging at the ribbon, and had to get Martha to help me. "It does draw stiff, sure. You take hold of one end. There, that was a tug! And I've dropped my pen in too."

We had sat and talked for maybe two minutes—it wasn't more than five, anyway—when Martha got up, saying she must go; she had so many calls to make, and this would be her last appearance out. So we shook hands, and off she went flouncing her petticoats, holding up a fold of her dress between her finger and thumb, and squeaking her new boots tremendously.

Oh me! Oh my-o! It must be awful to feel like that!

Her visit hadn't cheered me. I went out to the dining-room a bit downcast. I suppose I walked quietly, for when I got inside the door I saw Teddy get up hurriedly from the chair, where I had been sitting before Martha came, and go out into the kitchen.

I called to him once, but he didn't seem to hear, and the second time he answered something about going out to the barn, and being right back.

Then I saw the table drawer was open a little, and I felt sure I had closed it.

The wallet was there, plain to be seen, the strap not on it. "He must have seen it," thinks I, "and it won't be a surprise at all."

Then I looked through the pockets. The change was there, also the cards and the stamps, but the gold-piece was gone!

It wasn't there. It wasn't anywhere. I shook the wallet. I nearly unglued the back feeling around. I was sure, positive sure, certain, I'd fastened it with the double fastener and hasped it shut. I shook out the table cover, got a candle and searched the floor, went through my pocket and all my purses; I even swept the clean carpet all over, but the gold was not to be found. Then I went through the whole hunt again, before I gave up.

The thought would come: "Perhaps Ted knows something about it."

It kept worrying me, and Teddy didn't come back. It couldn't disappear without hands to help it, and Hannah had gone upstairs just after Martha came and wasn't down yet; besides, Hannah wouldn't—No, of course; nor Ted wouldn't. But where was it? It was gone, that was sure.

I called the lad in after a bit, I was getting so unhappy.

He was long in coming, dragged his feet and seemed unwilling, he that is generally so quick to come.

“Come in, Ted.”

“Ain’t tea ready? I thought sure it was tea-time.”

“No, Ted, it’s only half-past five. Teddy, boy, have you seen a purse of mine?—lying around or in the drawer, or anywhere?”

“A purse?” he echoed, looking very surprised, but getting red, and twisting around so as not to face me.

“Yes, my dear. A kind of pocket-book purse. Not my old one; another, a big one. Did you, Teddy?”

“Naw.”

“Perhaps you are not thinking. Think, Ted. It was here, and it seems not the same as I left it.”

“What would I be wantin’ with your purse? I never looked in no purse of yours in my life, so there!”

It didn’t sound natural. He spoke straight and bold enough, but he looked as guilty as guilt; and I was so unhappy, so overcome of misery.

I fretted and fussed all evening, was that restless and dumpy Ted noticed it, and so did Hannah.

"I wisht that Martha Shanks would stay to her own shanty and not come here upsettin' of us," said Hannah venomously. "When she makes one of her cheerin' visits you're that miserable it sets the hull of us to bein' fraxious."

She made my favourite pan-cakes and got an extra nice tea, and Teddy turned hand-springs and said such funny things I would have laughed, only there wasn't a laugh left in me.

When he was bidding me good-night, he said: "Auntie, I've changed my mind about a bicycle. It'll be better to wait till I'm bigger, and kin mebbe buy one myself."

I groaned out something, and told him to hurry into his bed.

I could not rest. I felt as if I must really know, as if there could be no peace for me, thinking and fearing, believing and doubting.

I took a long, long time getting ready for bed. I could not even pray, easy. I was going to blow out my lamp, but instead I turned it low and went into Ted's room. It's a pretty little room, and I let him have it

quite private. I never go in it when he's there, or alter where he puts things, or disturb anything; so I felt like a spy, going in that way.

The boy was lying fast asleep in his white nighty, with the moonlight shining on his face. He had a peaceful, innocent look, and it seemed wicked to be there trying to find him out a thief.

I gritted my teeth hard, and began searching his pockets and through his bits of treasures. There were bits of coloured glass, an elastic band, some string, some links of a brass chain, some tin tacks, and a lump of resin. Some white stones were tied up very carefully in a bit of cotton rag, three cents and an American nickel were in an old torn purse, and in a corner of a little wooden box, done up in a wad of dirty tissue paper, was something round and hard. I could have cried, I was so sure it was the gold-piece.

I went over and kissed Teddy, I felt so pitiful for him, and for myself, and then I unwrapped it.

It was an old flat, round, battered-up brass locket, and inside was a little screw of braided hair.

Around it was a paper with the printed letters: "MOTHER'S HARE."

I did cry then.

I did not search any more ; but all night, not resting well, I was wondering what I could do to help Ted to grow up a good, true, honourable man ; if it would be right to try to make him love me, and to love him and get an influence over him through love. He seemed some way dearer to me than ever he had been, and some way it seemed as if I had been all to blame.

I put a five dollar bill in the wallet, and on his birthday gave it to him, and he admired it a lot, seeming surprised and joyous, only he overdid it a little.

“ This was the pocket-book I was asking you about, my boy ; I was afraid you had seen it.”

“ And that would have spoiled the surprise, wouldn’t it, Auntie ? It’s the finest wallet I ever saw, and the thing I wanted the very worst.”

He had two boys to tea, and the way they ate, the fun they had, and the noise they made was wonderful. I made the birthday cake, all frosting and lighted candles, and to see their enjoyment would have made me happy, only I was too miserable.

After all my suspicions and wretchedness, where do you think I found that gold-piece ?

Why, in the card bag, to be sure, with Martha's card! I must have held it in my hand along with the pen, and slipped it in when I was pulling at the draw-string. I would have taken the solemnest affidavit, and been positive sure I was telling the truth, that I'd put it into the safe pocket and fastened it tight, which shows how a person might be mistaken—for I'm the carefullest person I know.

I would not have had Ted know how I'd suspected him for a good bit, but I was relieved one day when he confessed he had been looking in the drawer and had seen the pocket-book, and what I'd written in it—so he didn't think it was a lie when he said he had never opened a purse of mine, seeing that one was his.

I was so relieved, but somehow having the mystery cleared up didn't make me nearly so happy as my fears had made me miserable.

How a little thing that is painful or disagreeable will hurt and rankle, poisoning your mind and making you sad and doleful for days, while a little thing that is nice can happen without making you happier at all!

Which goes to show that we take sunshine and pleasantness as ours by right, without a "Thank you"; while we fuss and grumble at storm or trial as if we were unjustly used.

If such trifles could make us happy as will serve to make us utterly miserable, this would be a cheerfuller world. We have small capacity for joy, but of worry and trouble we can accommodate a heap.

Monday is stock-taking day with me, the time of the week when the visible supply and prices current are most in mind. I usually go through the pantry shelves, the preserve closet, and the cellar; with a look to the bread-box, the cake-tin, and the vegetable garden.

That would be in the mornings, and after dinner I used to stock-take myself—look over my feelings and intentions, my duties and my failures; reckon up what the Sunday had done for me, and what I'd done for the week-days just past, and meant to do for the ones to come.

This had been my habit for years, which made Monday a sort of trying day, if I was right faithful with myself, as I was apt to be.

I don't quite know when I began giving up the practice. But I do know that for a good while I'd grown indifferent to what was going on inside, and outside things were uninteresting. I hadn't been liking church, I had picked holes

in the sermons, and from criticising the preacher, I'd come to disliking the people.

And I've come to see it's all my own fault.

Some reflections came to me one Monday lately, which made me see how I'd wandered off the straight and narrow road, and gone blundering about trying to make a new path for myself, instead of standing still and asking to be led back.

I've come to see you can't get any blessing out of a sorrow if you are sullen with the Lord.

I wasn't resentful or rebellious, but I was sulking and showing I felt hurt.

The day before had been a nice bright Sunday morning. I wakened early and saw the sunshine, but drew the blinds to shut it out, thinking I'd lie still a bit longer and take an extra rest. I had been working very hard all week, right up to late Saturday night, doing things that might have been left a week or two just as well as not.

I felt languid, I almost deceived myself into thinking I felt sick. I heard the hall clock strike seven and eight, heard Teddy dress and go down, and then Hannah; heard the fire being made, all the time not moving, but meaning to get up. The next thing I heard was the clock striking eleven.

My head did ache then, and I was cross—old-fashioned, crabbed cross.

My breakfast was in the oven all frizzled up, the ham and eggs looking more like cinders than anything else in nature. The stove was nearly red-hot, the kettle nearly boiled dry, and through the kitchen window I could see Hannah and Ted having a wrestling match on the tulip bed, which I'd worked hard over the day before, getting it ready for geraniums.

I called out, asking them what they meant by desecrating the Sabbath and spoiling my flower-bed! I spoke right sharp too, which sent Ted off smart to the barn, and Hannah to the cellar for the potatoes for dinner.

I kept on growling and fault-finding most of the day, keeping Ted on the run with orders, which he took good-naturedly; he would bow and sweep out his arms like an actor, saying, "I go at thy behest," and strut off with a grand air.

There had been amateur theatics at the Temperance Hall—mostly the Methodist Choir; they had given a musical play affair, a cantata, besides a tragedy piece and a farce. I let Ted go with Nancy Smith, and since then he's been every character he saw except a good one.

I hadn't anything to read that suited me, so the afternoon dragged, and by evening there came on a heavy rain, such a right earnest downpour I couldn't get Hannah to venture out, and she hates to miss going Sunday evenings.

I couldn't think of one thing to fill in my time except to prowl around the attic store-room, hunting through an old trunk for something I was sure wasn't there.

It seemed to soothe my savage breast to be doing something. It was fine to hear the lashing of the rain on the roof, and the fierce swish of the wind against the windows.

It was almost bed-time when I went downstairs to lock up. Being in soft slippers, they did not hear me coming, and, all unobserved, I could see the bright kitchen interior, with Peter Amos Snider sucking his piccolo, Hannah sitting in the big chair, with her busy hands folded, while Ted stood on the table waving his arms and reciting very loud and fierce,

“The boy stood on the burning deck.”

I stood and listened, surprised at how well he did it, for when he came to,

“Go, ask the winds——”

and so on, it was fairly moving.

All at once I remembered what day it was.

"Teddy," said I sternly, "is that the way a Christian boy should act on a Sunday night?"

He made a farewell bow, jumped down from the table, and, looking at me, pretending to be sad, he said: "I'm none of your pious boys. I'm a real heathen, I am. I never do anything good, and I'm always doing everything bad."

"Don't speak as if you were proud of it. I'm ashamed!"

"I know I'd orter be, too; but if you don't want me plum ruined, you better bang me off to church and Sunday School while I'm young, and you can make me. You bet I won't forget it's Sunday, then."

"It's high time you were in your bed, young man. I'll attend to your case to-morrow," said I, looking severely into his little impish face. I felt such a pang of regret and shame. I knew I'd been a deal worse than he—as much worse as a hypocrite is than a mere pagan. The way I had acted that day and other days, I, a Christian and a church member, was setting a rare example for the boy I had taken charge of—not to mention Hannah.

I was a good while in my own room, before I

made up my mind and went and knocked at Ted's door.

"Come in," he called, in a muffled sort of voice. He was in his white nighty, kneeling on the low, broad window-sill, peering out into the darkness and the rain.

"Teddy, boy, ain't you afraid you'll catch cold?"

"No, I guess not," he replied, only half turning round. I could hear he had been crying.

I kneeled down beside him, putting my arms about him. "I'm feeling lonely and unhappy, too," said I.

He put his head back against me and his arm went round my neck.

"I was—thinking—about mother," he said, his voice choking over a sob. "I miss her awful nights, and Sundays worst of all. I feel like I couldn't be good except for mother. She made me want to, I'd—I'd like to be dead, too, so I would."

"Hush, boy, hush, my poor orphan laddie! It is wicked to wish to be dead. You don't know what good use the Lord will make of you some day, nor what you may be able to do for your poor brothers, when you are a man. I know you miss your mother. I'm glad you

don't forget her; a mother is the best friend a boy could ever have. It won't hurt you to cry for your mother; she cried for you many a time, and how she loved you all! That's right, let the tears ease you, and tell your Auntie all your trouble."

"Nobody ever kisses me good-night, now—I know I'm a bad boy. I b'lieve I want to be wicked, or I'd try to be good. P'raps I couldn't anyway, but I forget to try—Nobody knows the difference, no matter how hard I try—Mother used to talk good to me, and I used not to be wicked, because she cared—And I make you mad with my foolish ways. I'd ought to 'a died and gone to heaven before I got such a big boy—I'm only a trouble, and nobody would have me 'round a'cept for pity. Nobody cares for me."

All this came out in jerks, between sobs, and then I cuddled him and petted him as if he'd been a baby, instead of a long-legged boy. And I tried to make him see I did care for him, though I wouldn't tell what wasn't true, even to comfort him. I never was much of a hand to talk "good," I awfully hate to talk better than I act. I told him we'd try to love each other, and I was sure I would love him as much as ever I could love a boy. I tucked him in all

nice and comfy, kissing him before I left. He was sound asleep when I peeked in fifteen minutes later.

It's a dreadful responsibility to have to bring up a boy. They are such queer cattle. I don't know anything about them. How can I ever train that boy so he will go right?—it's awful to think I might help send him to destruction. Most boys slide down hill fast enough without being helped. I'm greatly fearing heaven will be like New England, so very scarce of men.

I want to help Ted. I do wish he'd be a Christian while he's young, before his mind is set against everything that is good. But in the meantime I've taken my own self in hand, and I'm watching and training Mary Wogg, Spinster.

She'll bear watching, and she knows it well.

A letter has come from Maud M'Gregor that has set me thinking. I believe I'd rather risk training Ted than have that wild, harum-scarum girl on my hands. Though she isn't a boy, I fancy she'd be a lot too many for me.

This was her letter:

“PRETTY POLLY,—You'll be surprised and delighted to hear that your respected niece (or is it cousin several times removed?) has come through the term at college without either

expulsion or explosion. The surprise of my one parent was pathetic, but he knows no joy because I am home again on his hands. He is a great burden to me, for he is again bent upon selecting a new mamma for me. He is now prospecting among my own friends, and seems to favour my best chum (the little cat). I can get no pleasure out of having the girls here, and now that he's taken to being so attentive, they are here all the time. So in self-defence I have to keep the house full of boys to help head Poppa off. He is getting to be a real stage parent, stern and forbidding. He has forbidden me to have three of my most inoffensive boy friends here any more ; because he thinks they come after my chum, the aforementioned cat, and they don't. They say so themselves. But my paternal relative thinks he knows better, and we have had several skirmishes, and minor engagements, and I foresee a pitched battle ahead. If I get pitched, O sublime Pollywoggles, I will fall back on you ! I meant to pay you a visit this summer, anyway, but while there is a chance of bringing the Pater to his senses I will stay. If I go our dragon of a housekeeper will keep both girls and boys away from the house, in her gently repressive way. So if you see me come marching along in an orderly retreat, don't be surprised, Miss Molly-cule. And you may as

well delude yourself into thinking you are pleased. I don't care a button for the particular little he-goat Dad makes most fuss about, but I won't be driven into driving away even a bow-legged Billy.—Your abused but undaunted,

“MAUD M'GREGOR.

“P.S.—In Toronto I met a young man from the country, named Dick Gray. He says he knows you. Our college and he went to the same church. We went, regularly, twice a day. And every time we went I saw him, and he saw me. He is very clever. You should have seen the clever way he cut me out of the bunch the night we were being herded to a lecture. You'd have taken him for a cow-boy, sure. He's doing well; they say studying is play to him and all the 'ologies plums. He is living with a clever doctor, tutoring his stupid son, and valeting his fine horses (Dick loves horses), and earning his board and some practical knowledge of the saw-bones business. He remembered me ever since that summer I spent with you when I wore pinafores and pig-tails. All the girls were in love with his looks—he is so manly and distinguished. Give him my love when you see him. *Pax vobiscum*, dear Pollyanthus.”

Now did any one ever read such a letter from

a girl just out of school? "Cut her out of the bunch"—what an expression! I hope she won't come into this quiet district, like a firebrand.

Dick came home last week.

CHAPTER XV

THERE'S the greatest change in Dick Gray. You'd hardly know him for the same boy.

He looked like a man before, was tall and big, and broad-shouldered, but now he carries his head with such an air. He always held it high, but it had a desperate, dare-devil tilt, and now there is so much dignity and self-possession about him his head keeps up from a sense of its own worth.

He comes over nearly every evening after tea and sits with me on the side veranda.

While he was away I tried hard to get on a cordial, friendly footing with Mrs Gray, but somehow she never responded. She was civil but cold ; I felt as if she hadn't even the old friendship—which never was warm—that she used to have.

Dick has told me all about his studies, his sports, and his hopes for the future. He speaks of his mother kindly ; says they get on very

well now at home—for he's taken the reins out of her hands and is running the farm himself. If he'll only master her, perhaps she'll consent to look up to him and be happy.

He is so lovely to me, it makes me feel like a queen.

The way Teddy admires him is a fine sight, and Dick is letting him know things. He doesn't need telling if only Dick will show him an example, or gives him an instance. You couldn't catch him pulling his knuckles or biting his nails now, and the way I've tried and the hundreds of times I've said, "Please don't," without curing him one bit!

Up to now I believe Ted thought his father the very finest made—in looks, manners, morals and knowledge—but now he's got a better example. I could not say anything, but it hurt me to see the boy take such a poor model to build by; for Mr Jones is as little remarkable for things you would like as any man I ever saw, and I've seen several.

I certainly am delighted with Dick. He tells me things he reads in his medical books, which he studies from dawn to breakfast-time every day; he talks to me on all sorts of subjects, as if sure I'd understand, and he's so pleasant and bright.

It's strange, though, he never mentioned Maud.

One evening when he was going away he took a pipe from his pocket, and began to fill it absent-mindedly as he said good-night.

I had never seen him smoke, nor smelled it on him, since he came home, and I thought he had given it up. I do hate it so. Next to drinking liquor I put smoking, a long way after, but still next. In my surprise I spoke, and my voice showed how sorry I was: "Oh, Dick, I did think you'd given up smoking!"

"Oh no, I have smoked for years," he said. "I depend on it a good deal for comfort."

"Aren't you a strong enough man to depend upon yourself and your Maker for comfort?" I asked reproachfully.

"Perhaps I should be, though I doubt whether I am." He spoke musingly. "Would you like me to give it up?"

"Could you, do you think, Dick?"

He waited a little while, then knocked out his pipe against the gate post and laid the pipe on top. He lifted his hat without a word and strode off across the fields.

I have that pipe now. He's never smoked since.

The strange thing about it was how unhappy I felt, not the least bit as if I'd won a victory, more as if I'd put a burden on the back of one I loved, who was heavily weighted before.

One day I was sitting on the veranda with my darning basket in front of me—darning and rocking, and thinking.

I was all alone. Ted and Hannah were off picking raspberries, which were just beginning to ripen. They came in early this year, the weather being hot after some days of lovely rain. Oh, what delightful days there have been this spring and early summer! the air has been like spice and balm, the woods and fields never looked so beautiful, and as for the sky, why, it's a picture day or night, a picture to dream over.

I had been alone all day, and now it was late afternoon. Nancy Smith and her little brother had gone along berrying, too; they had taken a nice picnic lunch, and soon I expected they'd be coming home, tired enough.

I had enjoyed myself. I went poking into all sorts of corners, in the kitchen, the shed, and the cellar—not to speak of out doors.

I had caught myself singing, “Hush, my babe, lie still and slumber,” in self-forgetful happiness. I never sing unless I am alone; if I did I reckon Hannah and Ted would come running with

buckets thinking the house was afire. My voice isn't noticeable for anything but scope.

I like darning, when the holes are out-and-out, sure-enough holes. I can fill 'em up quick, and that neat and flat they wouldn't hurt even Maud's corn (supposing she still has one).

I don't like strengthening the thin places; it takes far more time, and there isn't the satisfaction, nor anything much to show for your labour.

It's the difference between education and correction—between prevention and punishment. Training is a deal slower than using the whip.

Strange that Dick has never mentioned Maud!

Perhaps he doesn't think, but it has rather an odd look to me.

I'm glad I didn't ask her to come right on up. I asked her to visit me in the fall—Dick goes back to college the first of October.

I wish Mr Jones didn't keep coming, and coming. Once a week always, and sometimes twice, and so often when he must have known Ted would be in school. And now it's holiday time it's getting worse. He seems to think this is on the road to everywhere.

I've come to be real short with him, never asking him to a meal unless he hangs around

till it's right on the table. Ted is so pleased to have him, but as for me the sight of him chases away my appetite.

I suppose it must have been the sound of wheels in the distance that made me think about Mr Jones just then, for I became conscious that some one was driving along the side line; I could hear the horses' hoofs quite plainly, clop, clop, on the planking of the little bridge, telling of a loose shoe.

I could smell the dust rising in the hot air, but I would not look around—I was that sure it would turn out to be Mr Jones.

Some vehicle stopped outside the gate, then I jumped up for I saw a flutter of petticoats as a lady stepped on the wheel and sprang to the ground. She bounded along to the side gate, a tall, fine young lady, and in she came. She put her arms around my shoulders, and tilting up my chin with one hand, kissed me.

“ You—dear—sweet—homely—Aunt Polly ! ” she cried, shaking me at each word. “ Say you’re glad to see me, quick, or I’ll jump back into the waggon and go home.”

“ Why, Maud—Maud M’Gregor ! Why, you young cyclone, let me be till I get my breath, can’t you ? ” Then I held her off and looked at her.

Her face had been all alive with smiles, but now she cast down her eyes demurely, drew in the corners of her mouth, and I could see what a wicked girl she was—a big, handsome girl with a good complexion and a fine figure; with an air of fashion and distinction about her; with a wide mouth and a saucy nose and chin; with fine eyebrows and a mass of light brown hair; with a look that challenged admiration, demanded amusement, that knew not mercy.

I don't know that I really thought all that out as I looked at her, but I know I thought of Dick, and I thought "I pity you, Dick, if you care for her."

I liked her, though, from the first; while disapproving of her almost from start to finish.

I couldn't help laughing at the way she nodded to Hannah, as she and Ted came up with their pails of berries, and their tanned and stained faces and hands.

"I've heard about you, Hannah," she said, "and I've come to give you lots of trouble. And this is Ted—the boy who is breaking his poor Auntie's heart! Let me look at you." She tilted his chin up with the point of her first finger. "Not such a bad-looking little heathen Chinee, is it? Now shut your eyes and kiss your cousin, quick."

She gave him a sounding kiss, and he laughed out as he gave it back deliberately, with his eyes wide open.

"Come, old Slow-bones, elevate my belongings," she called, darting out to the waggon where the driver still sat (a decent man called Sawyer who goes to our church). "Why, man, you're asleep. A tired pair, you and your nag."

"You tire me with your talk," he returned, just to show his independence, for his smirk showed he was well pleased.

It took Sawyer, Hannah, and Ted to get the two big trunks off the waggon and up the stairs to the spare room. I think it would have broken their backs, only Maud was jibing them all the time.

Hannah wasn't long brewing a cup of tea in the kitchen for Mr Sawyer, and I stirred around lively, making ready for supper, as Maud said she was so hungry Ted was in great danger every time he went near her. He looked tender, she said, though not fat.

She kept us laughing telling of her adventures on the way from Hamilton. She said she flirted with the conductor, nursed a bronze pickaninny, and stole a lunch for it out of a paper bag that an old down-east Yankee left

in his seat while he went to the smoking car. She mimicked the way he talked when he came back searching for his "grub," and I couldn't get breath to tell her she ought to be ashamed, I was laughing so heartily. It wouldn't pay to lecture her about it, anyway, because like as not nothing she said was true—she always was a fine hand to make up stories, and she's better than ever (or worse) having practised so much.

No sooner was tea over—and she did eat!—than Maud says: "Well, what are we going to do to amuse ourselves this evening?"

"Teddy and I most generally read until it's too dark to see, then we sit on the veranda until it's time for bed."

"What a programme for a growing girl! Don't you have visitors? Don't you go out?"

"Yes, we go to prayer-meeting Wednesdays, and to Young People's Meeting once a month. And Mrs Scott runs in most any day she wants to borrow something, and neighbours drop in now and again."

"And I came here for excitement!" Maud said, casting up her eyes in horror. "I must have it, if I have to set the house afire. How are you going to entertain me, right now, this evening—that's what I want to know?"

"Well, I expect to go to bed extra early," said I, "having had already more excitement than usual, and as much as I can stand."

"No bed for me till midnight's magic hour. I could go to bed at home. I left home because my Poppa tried to make me. We had a few strenuous words about company and late hours, and His Graciousness advised me, in effect, to behave or get out. So I got out, but I don't need to behave, too, do I? Now tell me where lives the nearest unmarried man."

I turned away, displeased, but Ted piped up: "Will Shanklin is at his father's just round the corner. But he's a widower; you wouldn't wipe your shoes on him."

"Wouldn't I, son? I might if they needed wiping. Put on your chapeau, Teddrick, and we'll go to Shanklin's—I remember Martha—and borrow some new laid ham and eggs for Auntie."

"Don't bring me in," said I, "I'm no borrower."

"Well, I can ask the loan of a book for myself, or I'll say I've just stepped in to take a look at Mr Will. I don't mind what I say. I came to wake up this sleepy hamlet, and if we don't have a picnic, just call me Balaam. No time to lose. Come along, Teddibus."

They went, and they stayed.

Dick Gray came and sat a long time, talking. I told him my cousin from Hamilton had come unexpectedly, and was out with Ted.

He didn't say one word.

It must have been after ten when we heard merry voices, laughter, Ted's shrill whistle, and soon we could see Bill Shanklin shambling by Maud's side with Ted leading the way.

"I won't ask you in, Mr Shanklin, as it's past Auntie's bed-time," said Maud at the gate. We could see and hear her from where we sat in the shadow. "You'll come around some evening soon? I won't forget the drive you have promised me," and so on, talking and joking till I could have shaken her.

She came up the path shaking the dew from her long-tailed muslin skirt, came up the steps, and Dick rose and stood before her.

"Why, *Dick!*" she cried, and put her left hand quickly up to her throat.

They shook hands quietly; and Dick went into the dark sitting-room for a rocking-chair, and stood beside her until she got comfortably seated. She talked fast and flippantly, darting from one subject to another, addressing now me and now Dick (Ted had slipped in the back door and gone to bed), and not

pausing for a reply. Dick barely opened his lips.

But he looked at her.

It was only a few minutes before Dick rose to say good-night. He shook hands with me—a thing he hadn't done, ever, as far as I can remember—and then with Maud. Maud walked with him to the gate, talking gaily, but he only paused a moment, lifted his hat, and went on.

I had collected my belongings to go in when she joined me and carried in her chair. "Aunt Polly-Wolly-Wogg, I'm glad I came. I think I'm going to like it here," she said, but I didn't either laugh or answer.

"Good-night, Maud," I said, giving her a lamp.

CHAPTER XVI

DICK came every night, right after tea.

All day Maud was busy, flying from house to house, for it didn't take her long to know every one I knew, and a good many I didn't, and nearly every one came to see her—all my particular friends but Mrs Gray. She didn't come, and Maud never went there.

If Maud was home at noon she'd sure have company here of some kind, old or young, and she'd have boys and girls coming all afternoon, and give them lemonade and cake on the veranda, or she'd be off to the woods or through the fields, with Ted or me alone, or with others, all day long as lively as a cricket and as happy as a lark.

I never saw any one like her for filling the day full up with activity and enjoyment, but by tea-time she would quiet down; and in the evening, though she always dressed herself so carefully, she never seemed to want to go

away from home or have people here, but was willing to sit right still with only ourselves.

When Dick comes he and Maud talk, how they do talk! I sit in my own corner and they stay by me most of the time, though there's nothing to keep them fixtures on the veranda but their own will. Dick will walk up and down outside with Maud when she suggests it, and come back when she says so, but he never originates any amusements—he just comes as he did before.

Maud had been here two weeks, when after tea one evening she all of a sudden called to Ted as he was leaving the room, saying: "Go, get on your best necktie, and come a-walking with your lady-love."

She was dressed in her lovely white dotted muslin and had on cherry-coloured ribbons, with nothing on her head but a bow.

"Adieu, Auntie Woggles!" she called back to me as they walked out into the road, and down toward the Corners.

Dick came unusually early, and we had a nice quiet talk. They didn't come back, and first Dick grew restless, then sat silent, looking very pale and stern.

It was ten o'clock before I said anything.

Then I spoke, when perhaps I'd better have been silent.

"Dick, I hope you won't think this is any fault of mine. I did not know Maud was going out, and I couldn't have stopped her if I had. She goes her own way, regardless of anybody."

"Wise girl, isn't she?" he returned, with a short laugh. "I hope she is having a good time."

"Well, I don't."

"Oh, you're hard on her. She's fond of excitement, and we're very quiet folk. I have no right to expect her to stay in every evening to amuse me. If you don't mind being left alone I will go now. Good-night."

He went out the back way to cross the fields, the nearest way, but rather rough for walking. It was two hours later that Maud and Ted came home, and it seemed as if half the people at the Corners were with them, there was such a shouting and singing, which seemed to me no proper way to act after midnight in the quiet country.

I thought perhaps Dick would stay away for a few nights, just to show Maud he didn't care, but he came the same as ever, and one night she'd be off driving with Bill Shanklin, and another out to tea at Martha Switzer's,

or to a corn roast at Piper's, or she'd have people here to tea—something every night for a week.

Then one night as Dick came to the gate she and Ted were ready to start for Young People's Meeting, and Dick walked with them to the church, and came back and sat down beside me.

I'd made up my mind, over and over, that I would not say a word to either of them. I'd let them go on; it was none of my business. But I looked at Dick and saw lines of trouble in his face—his dear face, that looked so like Tom's—only I never saw Tom's look sad.

"Dick," I said, "I hope you won't think me interfering, but I'm so worried. My boy, I wouldn't wish you to fix your heart on Maud. Perhaps there isn't any danger, but she's wonderfully attractive, and I wouldn't like trouble to come to you from my house. I like Maud, I feel her charm myself, hard as I am; but I don't trust her one bit. I don't believe she ever thinks of a thing but pleasure and excitement. She is vain and extravagant and thoughtless. She's truthful, but not true. She has a sort of generosity and warm-heartedness, but she doesn't mind who is put out so long as she gets her own way. That's how I read her, but

perhaps I don't hold the right key. She shows herself to me like that—a coquette, a cruel, vain flirt—and, Dick, I don't want her to fool you. You are not the kind of man that improves under the hands of a flirt."

He laid his hand on mine and smiled his sweet smile. No one ever had a sweeter smile than Dick, not even Tom; but he smiles so seldom.

"Poor Aunt Polly," he said, "I was afraid you were troubling. Your warning comes too late—seven years too late—and I doubt if it ever would have been effectual. I believe I know Maud better than you know her, and far, far better than she knows herself. I think she is much as you say, but that is not all of her. I believe there are depths to her heart, her character, her mind, that love only can divine, and which perhaps love alone can call forth. I love her. I love her whatever she is; whatever she does, I love her. I began to love her, she a bright, winsome sprite, and I a sullen, silent lad, when I first saw her years ago. I know the day will come when she will love me; but, if it should not, I will still love her, her only, till I die."

"Dick, dear Dick, it will be such a struggle. You will be so unhappy."

"Perhaps happiness would not be good for

me. I mean to win Maud if I can, but I will pursue my career, I will not let her ruin my life; and unless I thought I could make her happier than any other man could possibly do, I would give her up this night."

He left me then, and when Maud came home a little after nine, she seemed disappointed to find him gone.

There came a day, a scorchingly hot day, without a breeze, except now and again a swirl that raised the dust and felt like a blast from a furnace. But as the sun went down, a light, cool wind came out of the south, and a full August moon rose gloriously.

We had stayed in the house all day with darkened blinds, panting, in garments so light as to be hardly worth mentioning—I, feeling good-for-nothing, and Maud seeming tired and out of spirits. We were glad enough to see the last of the sun, and took our places on the veranda, saying little, quietly watching the light in the west die fainting away and the moon come up, regal, in her silver beauty.

Dick was late.

I had my knitting, but my hands lay idle in my lap, and Maud sat in the hammock, giving herself a little push with one of her pretty feet occasionally, and then letting "the

cat die" slowly. She did look pretty. She wears the simplest, sweetest clothes, everything so suitable and tasteful, and worn with an air of distinction. She knows how to arrange her hair to suit whatever mood she is putting on—for it seems to me she puts on her moods and adapts her looks, as she does the rest of her belongings.

I was nearly asleep, indeed I think I had dropped off, when Dick came, about nine o'clock.

Dick sank down on the top step, almost at Maud's feet. He said he was very tired, having driven his mother over to his brother-in-law Baxter's, and back, besides being very busy with the harvest.

I was so drowsy I hardly spoke; and Dick dropped his voice as he went on talking to Maud. I'd have needed to be very wide awake to hear a word they said, but I liked the murmur of their voices, I loved the coolness after the heat of the day, and off I went sound asleep. I heard the clock strike ten, and roused up enough to open my eyes and see that the two were still seated as they had been, only Maud was leaning over toward Dick, and was passing the palm of her hand over Dick's hair lightly; rubbing it as you might the bristles

of a clothes brush—for Dick had very thick hair, and, being cut short, all but the front lock, it stood straight up. He certainly had lovely hair.

The moon poured a flood of silvery light over the two young forms, and I felt a strange awe, a sharp catching of the breath, as I saw Dick's upturned face, so full of love and longing, so noble and entranced.

Maud leaned more toward him, lifting with her other hand the lock of hair that would always fall over his brow, patting it back into place.

Dick reached up and drew both hands down, holding them palm upward on his own two hands, and kissing and kissing them. Then he buried his face in her hands and stayed still a good while.

His face was very white as he rose and drew her to her feet, with her hands crushed close against his breast. He gave her a long, long look. Then he said: "I'm going now, Maud—Maud."

I moved, and got up yawning. "I'll be off to my bed. Good-night, children," I said, as I passed them.

I've found out that if you want to go and

leave two people alone, the best way to do it is to get up and go.

The house felt very close and stuffy when I got inside, and upstairs it was worse. I put off lighting my lamp, and was most undressed before I went in the dark to draw down the blinds.

A side window of the bay looks diagonally toward the gate, quite close, too, and there, bathed in the soft radiance of the moonlight, stood Maud and Dick; Dick outside, and the gate shut between them. As they were standing I could see both faces perfectly—Maud with her chin propped up saucily on one hand, the elbow resting between the pickets of the gate.

I thought how handsome they were, and my throat tightened, for they were so young and looked at each other with such a look.

The air was so hushed, as if nature held her breath. There was no sound, except that from far down in the marshy place under the little bridge I could hear the croaking of the frogs.

“Don’t you want to, Dick?” I heard Maud say, challengingly, temptingly.

“Yes, I want to, very much,” he returned. He did not move away, but he put his hands hard down into the pockets of his flannel coat.

“Then, why don’t you?”

“I am not given to kissing,” he said grimly. “The only woman I ever mean to kiss is the one who is to be my wife.”

“You’re much too serious—you’ll miss a lot of fun. All the boys seem to like it”—saucily.

“Yes? And you? Do you like it, too?”

“I simply adore it—if it’s well done.”

“I’m afraid I would be clumsy, having had no practice. And I don’t care to practice on the sweetheart of other men.” They both spoke lightly, mockingly, and in their ordinary tones, but their looks spoke a different language.

“It’s really a mistake to be so particular. Now I, I don’t care to be exactly promiscuous, but with discrimination—— So you won’t—try?” Her voice was wickedly alluring.

“No, not to-night. I think it better to master myself than have you master me.”

“You’ll be sorry. You’ll call yourself a fool before you get home. I believe you would sleep sooner, and sounder, if you were less master of yourself now. Don’t you?”

I stepped back out of range with the guiltiest conscience, and knowing it would startle them if I drew down the blinds, I slipped into bed as quickly as I could in the dark. I said my prayers, and I prayed for them—I surely would

have kissed her if I'd been Dick. Her pretty face and the moonlight would have been too much for me—even if I didn't love her. And Dick does. Poor Dick! I felt so worried. I know Maud should have been ashamed of herself. Girls didn't act that way when I was young—at least not to my knowledge.

“Are you asleep, Auntie?” called a tired voice at my door.

“No, not yet. Do you want me, Maud?”

“May I come in?” She came in and crouched down beside my bed on a low chair. She laid her head beside mine on the pillow. “I'm so tired. I feel as if I'd been whipped.”

“It has been such a hot day,” I volunteered lamely.

“It isn't that. Aunt Polly, Dick wouldn't kiss me.”

I gave a jump and a gasp, but couldn't say a word.

“I wanted him to,” she went on in a dreary, hopeless voice, “and he wouldn't. I hadn't any idea I really wanted him to; but I knew I did when I found he wouldn't. I thought I was just tantalising him, that I would box his ears or slip away from him if he tried—but when he wouldn't, when he said he

wouldn't, and didn't, I wanted him to more than I ever wanted anything in all my life."

She rubbed her fluffy, silky head against my hair. I put my hand on it, stroking it.

"I'm not at all a wicked girl, but I wish I were better. Dick is twice as good as I am. I want to be better, but I wish I wanted to twice as hard. If Dick liked he could help me, but he's so set and hard—he only makes me say things I don't mean. I like more pliability, more give and take; I'm willing to take all anybody will give, and ask for more. I—I'm a poor, badly-used orphan, Aunt Polly. I feel so lone—lonely. Mayn't I come and sleep with you?"

"Why, yes, if you wish, Maud. Yes, my dear, anything you like."

"I'll be back," she said, springing up with a sprightlier air. "And—and you won't be glad Dick didn't? You aren't, are you?"

"No, indeed, Maud. No, my dear."

I expected her a long while before she came; but she came at last, clad in a long muslin nightdress all trimmed with lace and having a low, round neck that showed all her pretty throat. Her hair was in two great braids down her back, and she carried a lamp in her two hands, which lighted up her face

with its strange, strained look—a suffering, almost a desperate look.

"Aunt Polly, I've been thinking," she said with an affectation of carelessness, and yet hesitatingly, "perhaps Dick—you don't think it possible, do you?—that Dick didn't want to—didn't want to, as badly as I thought—as I wanted him to—— Because if *I* thought that, I would make him sorry—I would make him so sorry for himself—I would pay him well, even if I had to go smash for it myself now, and ever more, amen."

"I think if I were you, Maud M'Gregor, I'd say my prayers and go to bed," I replied sharply.

"Thank you. A good suggestion. That is what I'll do. Good-night, Aunt Polly."

With a light laugh she left me, but it was daylight before I got to sleep.

CHAPTER XVII

I NEVER saw Maud in such wild spirits as she was the next morning. I never heard her say so many laughable things.

The Maud of last night was gone, leaving not a trace behind, and this Maud was her real, usual self, only more so.

She helped Hannah clear the breakfast table, put Ted's front hair up in curl papers, dressed him up in Hannah's baking apron, and set him washing the dishes while she wiped them—telling funny stories all the time until we were all tired out laughing.

She and Ted played in the yard, chasing each other, playing tag and catch, romping and tearing around like a pair of young colts—or like happy, whole-hearted, care-free children.

“Ted, wouldn't you like to go somewhere for a lark? Wouldn't it be grand to all go to Dunston and do up the town?”

“Wouldn't it, just!” responded Ted.

“What silly thing would you like to have to eat?”

“Pea-nuts and oranges.”

“That’s two things, greedy! Now, you choose, Aunt Wolly-pog.”

“I’d like chocolate drops and nut taffy.”

“Listen to that piggy young thing. Well, I’m perishing for a cream soda. I’d walk one mile and drive twelve for a soapy glass full of coolness. Don’t you think we could get it in Dunston?”

“They have a soda fountain in the drug store there—down the street, a piece from the station, near the hotel,” volunteered Ted.

“I propose we have a dizzy-wizzy adventure,” said Maud impressively. “Let us harness Dobbin, dress up in our best, and go get our dearest wants supplied. And perhaps—perhaps we could stand on the station platform and see the toot-toot cars go by.”

“I’m willing to go,” said I. “It’s a much cooler day, and I need some knitting cotton.”

“Aunt Mary, you forget, father’s coming,” spoke Ted, sorrowfully.

“So he is,” I returned (I hadn’t forgotten. It was remembering that had made me so willing to go.) “If you think you should stay

home, Maud and I will go and bring home a treat for you."

"I'd like awfully to go," he said, with such a disappointed look.

"It wouldn't be half the fun without you, Teddinger. Your Daddy might not mind, if he comes."

"Oh, he'll come. When he says so, it's sure. I—I guess I got to stay home."

He harnessed up cheerfully enough, but he looked forlorn standing by the gate watching us go. It was eleven when we got away, and Mr Jones was coming at twelve.

Maud was in such mad spirits that she put some life in sober old Brownie, who picked up her feet and went faster than for many a day. Maud whistled and sang as she drove, called out a greeting to every person we saw or passed, which I was glad was not many, for they all knew me.

At Dunston Maud would drive first to the railway station, but we only saw a freight train shunting—the express not being due for an hour. We put Brownie up at the hotel stables, and had our dinner at the hotel—and a right fine dinner Maud thought it was for twenty-five cents. Then we were free to walk up and down the street looking in the shop

windows. There are stores on both sides of the street for the whole block, no dwellings at all, except a doctor's, and that has an office in front.

There were a good many people on the streets, it being noon-time, and Maud attracted a good deal of attention, which she seemed to like. I made her come into some stores with me, where I bought a few things I wanted, and Maud more, that she didn't want. She was very lively—too much so by far, I thought, but I'm old-fashioned. She asked for the most ridiculous things, such as "the milk of human kindness" at the drug store, and "Adam's apples" at the grocery. And the way she drank ice-cream soda made me downright nervous. Everybody smiled at her and seemed delighted, but I was more than a bit ashamed.

It was well on in the afternoon before we were ready to start for home. Maud was seated in the buggy outside the hotel, and a couple of men were stowing away our parcels, while I was fixing Brownie's bridle, which was buckled up too tight. I was ready to step in when Maud said: "Look, Auntie, do look!" nodding in the direction of a young couple, who were walking along the street toward us, so wrapped up in

each other they could see nothing else. "Now, wouldn't that assassinate you! Aren't they killing? Peaches and cream, charlotte russe, jelly—a—oh!"

The young man had torn his eyes from devouring his companion and was looking at Maud, for she had risen from her seat and stood up straight in the high buggy, thus being a very conspicuous mark. I saw Maud's face all light up with surprise as the young man caught her eye, the dimples began to play hide-and-seek in her cheeks, and a broad smile parted her lips.

The man, a nice, clean-looking young fellow, raised his hat as Maud bowed, and when she stepped forward to jump to the side-walk, he hurried forward and helped her down.

"Why, how surprised I am to see you!" exclaimed Maud, as she shook hands with the young man, and cast an enquiring glance at the pretty young girl. "To think of my meeting you here, of all places in the world! How glad I am I chanced to see you! When did you come?"

"I arrived in Dunston last night, but—" he began, looking awkward and puzzled. Thinks I, "He can't remember her name, and doesn't like to say so."

"How lucky!" said Maud, "how delightful!"

What a time we will have ! And you do look so well, far better than last summer. Such a ravishing moustache as you have acquired ! ” He raised his hand and smoothed his streaks of fluffy down, which didn’t look to be more than three months old, if that. “ No wonder I hardly knew you. Do you think I’ve grown ? ” She stood off, stretching up on her tip-toes, smiling sweetly, while the fair little girl’s face grew black as a thunder-cloud.

“ I—I can hardly tell—I—you—really, I cannot say, I’m sure,” he stammered, getting redder than the posy on Maud’s breast.

“ Oh,” she cried delightedly, “ you’re the same old boy ; not changed a bit ! You never would give an opinion. How are the folks ? ”

“ My folks ? Oh, quite well, thanks. I—we are in a bit of a hurry. I—I think—I rather believe I’ll have to go.”

“ Oh, don’t go yet, I have plenty of time. I want to hear all the news, all about Allie. Is the engagement still on ? ”

The other girl gasped, but drew nearer ; the young man turned from red to purple.

“ It’s a mistake, you’re mistaken in the party, I don’t know——”

“ It isn’t likely you’d know now, is it ? ” Maud broke in, looking archly at him. “ You

naughty boy, don't you know it's *safer* to be off with the old——”

This time it was the shy little girl that interrupted, with a quiet dignity, saying: “Introduce me to your friend, please, Charley.”

“I—I can't. I can't recall the name. Your face is familiar”—to Maud—“but I can't place you.”

“You remember meeting me, but you forget my name, is that the trouble, Charley?” asked Maud, and waited, quizzically, for his reply.

“Ye—es, in a way. But not distinctly. I am at a loss——”

“That's nothing new, you always were, you know,” said Maud, laughing. “My name is Maud M'Gregor. Now you remember?”

He seemed less sure than ever, but he introduced her to Miss Wing, and Maud turned to me quickly, with the wickedest look: “Auntie, this is my old friend Charley, and his friend Miss Wing. Miss Wogg, Miss Wing—My Aunt, Charley. And now tell me all about Allie.”

“You are entirely mistaken,” he said, greatly distressed. “I know nothing of any Allie.”

“Why, what a good forgetter you must keep! Think of spooning a girl all summer and then forgetting her very name! But it's all right—

all this shall be on the quiet ; I won't mention having seen you."

"I tell you, you're mistaken, quite mistaken. I don't remember you at all—I don't believe I ever met you."

"I suppose you'll say next you weren't at the hotel at the Beach, last summer," said Maud caustically.

"Yes, I—— What Beach? No, I was not."

"And you never were engaged to Allie Lester, and you are not Charles Edward Prescott!" cried Maud indignantly, her eyes snapping.

"I most certainly am not. My name's M'Ginnis."

Maud burst out laughing. "Oh, fie, you wicked, wicked boy! M'Ginnis, is it? Why M'Ginnis of all earthly names? That's just one of your foolish jokes, isn't it, Miss Wing? It's too silly to play it on me, but—but perhaps I am not the one you want to deceive."

"I'm deceiving nobody. My name is M'Ginnis. I don't know you at all. Come on, Dora, come away."

"Not until you explain why you have given Miss Wing a false name," said Maud, righteous indignation in every eye-winker.

"I really think you should explain," I chimed

in, mildly. "Miss Wing is too sweet a little girl to be imposed upon."

"I never did, I assure you. It's—it's all a beastly mistake."

"I'd thank you to tell me, right here, when you met this lady, where she knew you as Charles Edward Prescott, and what Allie Lester is to you? I want the whole truth"—this from little Miss Wing, as gentle-looking a little lass as ever you saw, but now in a royal rage.

"I never saw her in all my life," he said deliberately. "I never heard her name before. I was at Old Orchard Beach last summer, but not at a hotel, and I never heard the name of Charles Edward Prescott."

"Come, Auntie," said Maud, smiling scornfully, stepping into the buggy and lifting the lines. "When one tells a story, it's quite as well to tell a good one."

We drove away without a backward glance. I had been fidgety for some time, because people in front of the hotel and from the stores around had been watching us and enjoying the sight, but I'm pretty sure they could hear nothing.

I was anxious to hear all Maud knew about that false young man, but she held the lines tight, sat up very straight, with her gaze fixed on the road

ahead, and never said a word. I could feel her give an occasional twitch, sort of heaving, as if she were in dreadful pain but was trying to hide it, while we drove down one block, turned around the corner, passed a few houses, and were out on the quiet country road.

“Take the lines, quick, and hold me, Auntie, before something happens!” cried Maud, in a gurgley voice. “Oh, oh, oh, I’m sure I can’t live! Wasn’t it too, too, too——”

She clutched me, and rocked me back and forth; she shook me, she squeezed me; she doubled herself all up and tied herself into a knot, and then with rumblings and bubblings she burst into peal after peal of laughter.

I had to join in, I couldn’t help myself, though I knew it was cruel; for Maud, who never had a nerve, to feel badly enough to go into hysterics showed what she must be suffering.

I soon stopped, but Maud kept right on, and all I could say was, “Never mind, Maud; never mind, my dear,” as sweetly as possible. It only made her worse, so I commanded her sternly: “Pull yourself together. Quit right now. I have no patience with hysterics, and you’ve got to stop.”

“Auntie Poll, you’ll be the death of me!

Hysterics, indeed ! Oh, Auntie—M'Ginnis ! his name's M'Ginnis ! Why couldn't it have been Dinnis ? It should have been Dinnis ! I think Miss Wing—Wing, no less, celestial pigeons !—will change it to Dinnis. Aunt Woggley, did you ever see anything so comical as that pair walking off ? Where, oh where, was their air of devotion ? Where had vanished their honey and syrup ? Where did their paradise go ? Oh, oh, oh ! ”

She laughed again, long and loud, but she stopped squirming, took the lines and whipped up Brownie.

“ Tell me, dear old owl, wasn't it a picnic ? You acted beautifully, only I think you were fooled yourself. You thought I knew him, I believe ! ”

“ And didn't you know him ? ” I enquired, sternly.

“ Know him ? Of course I didn't. That was the joke. I knew I'd never seen the man before. If you look at me like that I'll have another spasm.”

“ Then why did you do it ? ”

“ Just for a lark. The sight of them made me wicked, they were so precious lovey-dovey. I'd had my eye on them for five minutes, and for all his devotion he cast glances at me, which

told me he would be a terror if he had the chance. *He* wasn't a mite deceived; he knew from the start he hadn't met me, but was willing to encourage my mistake."

"Was it all a make-up? Wasn't there ever an Allie or a Charles Edward What-d'you-call him?"

"Not to my knowledge, but he's a man with a past. I could see that. It was simply an inspiration. I knew he was a flirt, and I *detest* flirts. Miss Wing will make it interesting for him, if thin lips tell anything."

CHAPTER XVIII

I WAS glad that Maud had promised to go down to Switzers' to tea that evening, for I wanted a little quiet time for thought, and I felt I could not endure seeing her befooling Dick before my very eyes.

It seemed to me she must be heartless, quite heartless, thinking about nothing in the world but her own momentary amusement and pleasure.

Dick came early, and seemed lighter-hearted and happier than I had seen him for some time.

His mother was going away the next day for a week's visit, down to the Baxters', beyond Dunston. Jim Baxter still lived in the old place with his mother and elder brother, who was a cripple; and it was to that same dour household he had taken pretty Effie Gray a bride—and there she had lain, dead, with her little baby on her breast, within a year—broken-spirited and broken-hearted, so it was said.

But that was years ago, and Jim Baxter still mourned her; and the estrangement of long years between Mrs Gray and him had seemingly been bridged over.

Dick said he was glad his mother had become reconciled with Jim, for Jim had always meant well, and old grudges could not too soon be buried. Then he spoke of a change he fancied he saw in his mother, signs of breaking up, little lapses of memory, infirmities of temper, unreasonable demands and unjust reproaches. I could see how the prospect of having her away for a short time raised his spirits and relieved him.

When I told him where Maud was he asked why I hadn't gone, and I said I hadn't been asked. "It's a young people's party," I added, "and I'm old folks. Why didn't you go?"

"Oh, I'm old folks, too. Martha Shanklin, as a kittenish bride, and Switzer, as a riotous groom, are too young for me! Let the young folks work at playing while we sit comfortably at rest."

The next evening when Dick didn't come, I reckoned he had driven his mother over to Baxters' and hadn't got back in time; but I didn't tell Maud that; I was glad to see she fidgeted.

The night after, I was sitting alone in my corner with a shawl around me, for it had grown cold, threatening rain, which other places had got but we needed badly. It was nearly nine o'clock, and the moon hadn't risen or didn't show any light through the clouds.

Dick came along, whistling gaily. "All alone in the dark, Auntie?" he called cheerily, and then sat down beside me in Maud's favourite chair.

"Yes, Ted's away to town over-night with his father, Hannah's down the road somewhere with Peter Amos Snider, and Maud's out driving with a friend from Hamilton."

Then I told him how a young man named Taylor (Maud called him Billy, and he *was* bow-legged) had driven over from Dunston with a livery rig, and Maud had gone out with him. This was in the early afternoon, and they had likely stopped for tea somewhere on the road, for Maud had said they would be back early.

"Ah yes," said Dick; "I met Mr Wilmington Taylor in Toronto at Maud's College closing. Not a bad sort; quite harmless, I thought."

I sniffed. He was a dressed-up, dandy fop, two inches shorter than Maud when they were standing up, and an inch taller when they were sitting down—that kind of shape. She acted

surprised to see him, but I believe she had sent a telegram to him to come, the day we were in Dunston. To think of wasting her time on a creature like that with Dick here waiting for her!

It was eleven o'clock before they came, and I'd have been in my bed, only Dick didn't offer to go away. We could hear voices singing "Larboard Watch, Ahoy," long before we heard the sound of wheels or saw the rig turn the corner.

Dick went to the gate and lifted Maud out; and while he and the young man were tying the horse, Maud came in and whispered: "We're starving, Auntie. We couldn't eat anything at the hotel where we stayed for tea."

I bustled around and got cake and lemonade, Dick helping me, for Hannah had come in long before and gone to bed.

When I had cleared away, I came back to find Dick and Mr Taylor talking quite briskly, Maud leaning back in her chair, silent for once.

"Miss Wogg," Dick said to me, "Mr Taylor has been telling me he intends staying in the neighbourhood some days, until a camping party joins him from Hamilton. I've been warning him against our little hostelry. You

would find it very crude, Mr Taylor—the rooms poor, the meals far worse."

"I left my kit at the hotel at Dunston," said Taylor. "I'll have to drive back there to-night."

"Not with that horse," said Dick. "I wouldn't be surprised if you found him out there now lying down between the shafts. He's dead beat—looks as if he hadn't seen an oat to-day. Be merciful to your beast, take pity on yourself, and be kind to me by accepting my invitation."

"Oh, come now! It's too cheeky, you know," said Taylor.

"My mother is away, and I'd be glad of your company; besides which, anything I could do for a friend of Miss M'Gregor's would be a pleasure. I wish Mr Taylor to stay at our house while he is in this section, Miss Wogg. Won't you help me to persuade him?"

"Billy, you make me tired," Maud broke in. "Go along with Dick if he wants you, and don't act like a baby."

Billy laughed sheepishly, and said no more. He didn't look happy, and he seemed dead tired. I'd have left him to sleep on the road if I'd been Dick; I don't understand Dick at all.

As they were leaving, Dick bent over Maud and said : "Did you enjoy your drive?"

"Oh, hugely," replied Maud with animation.

"Tired though, aren't you, little girl?"

His voice was soft and kind, and his smile wonderfully sweet. Maud gave him such a strange look, and after they were gone I saw her eyes were wet.

They put the poor horse up in my stable, and Dick took Mr Taylor, in his tight patent leather shoes, out the back way, over the fields and through the bit of bush. I'm sure the city-bred young man would rather have had the smoother going of the road, even if it had been much longer, for it had grown darker and the rain had begun to fall gently.

I predicted blistered heels, if not bunions, for Taylor, without feeling any pity for him, even though it ought to be Maud who should suffer.

She looked as if she had never so much as heard the name of suffering when she appeared at breakfast in one of her prettiest dresses, a rose-pink chambray, with a face as fresh and sweet as the morning, which was clear and sunny after a night of pleasant showers. The air was full of moist, clean fragrance; one breathed deep to take in all that was possible,

and revelled in each draught as in new life. I felt happy, buoyant, as if every care I ever had, had turned into a blessing. Maud looked happy but thoughtful, and as time passed she grew restless, going from window to door, looking and looking until dinner was over, when she went upstairs and took a long while dressing. She came down all in white, a soft frilly muslin, with filmy lace over the arms and shoulders, without a touch of colour except the bright rose of her cheeks and the vivid red of her lips.

I could see that it was only by an effort that she held herself still—she is so resolute and vigorous, action comes easier to her than waiting—but she had to wait, for it was past five o'clock before we heard or saw any one, then came the sound of hoofs, and trotting along the road were Dick and young Taylor, riding horseback.

Dick was on Black Prince, as proud and handsome a steed as ever was seen; Taylor on a big rusty-spotted grey, a good safe goer, with an easy mouth but a hard gait. Dick never looks so well as on horseback, it wakes him up, makes him animated and dashing; and having everything correct in accoutrements and dress he was a great contrast to

Taylor, who sat anyway at all to keep on, and had nothing as it should be except a pair of very high, shabby riding-boots.

As it happened, Maud had never seen Dick ride, and she didn't attempt to hide how he impressed her, or her admiration.

"Looks great, doesn't he, Miss Maud?" shouted Billy, who had hard work edging his way up to the gate. "I was such a duffer I overslept this morning; never lifted a peeper till eleven, and then found my feet had grown too big for my boots."

"Wouldn't Dick's fit you?"

"None but these old-timers. So he proposed I should postpone my call on you until afternoon, when we could ride down together. He tramped me all over his bloomin' farm, and I don't mind confessing if I'd had to walk down here I'd have gone to bed instead."

"I didn't know you could ride."

"I can't. Dick put me up on the Prince here, but he wouldn't hold me—stood on his hind legs until I slipped my cable and went to grass. And it was worse with the little mare; she shook me straight, she wanted to kill me—the finest little three-year-old you ever saw. Dick's breaking her for a lady—you ought to ride her, Ma Belle——"

"Don't say sweet things to me in French," said Maud. "I have a prejudice against it; a friend once called me a 'june filly.'"

A roar of laughter broke from both the boys, and Taylor turned to Dick. "There's a name for the little mare—call her *Jeune Fille*, after Miss Maud."

"I'll leave her to be named by her prospective owner," laughed Dick.

"Three years old, and not named yet? What a perfect shame! How can she know when she's called, Dick?" enquired Maud.

"I often call her My Lady Coquette and sometimes Contrary Brute; she answers to either name indifferent well."

"You'd look stunning on her, Miss Maud; she's a perfect picture, such action, such style. Don't you ride, really?"

"I never have, since I rode bareback behind Dick driving the cows to pasture in prehistoric times. But I'm sure I could," she said dauntlessly. "I'm always quite sure I could do anything anybody else can, and I never mind a few tumbles, trying."

"Well, you should ride," urged Billy, "it's simply great. We galloped up a steep hill, and, by Jove, it felt like flying. I shouted like

a Sioux. How many miles have we covered, Gray?"

"About fifteen."

"Then you won't think it quite so great to-morrow," I called from my corner. "Or perhaps you'll think it greater, but not so gay. Put up your horses now, and come in and stay for tea."

But no, neither of them would consent, although Maud looked reproachfully at Dick, while she patted Black Prince's nose and rubbed her cheek against his glossy neck. "Do, Dick, please," she coaxed.

They had promised to be back at the farm, he said, and Taylor would feel better in his own shoes and a clean collar—Peter Amos Snider had been sent over to Dunston with the livery rig and would bring Taylor's traps back with him. So after they had stood there at the gate, talking and laughing, the horses pawing up the gravel, curveting, and showing off, until, I for one, was tired of seeing them, they went away at a hard gallop, taking the longest road home.

"Three to five miles more," said I to myself, "makes a pretty day's work for a soft rider—not to mention tramping over rough ground and walking down here this evening. I see

through you, Master Dick ; it's murder you're after, nothing less." And yet he seemed really charmed with Taylor, and was so genial and merry, whereas he is mostly cool and quiet, not expanding easily at all. I don't understand him, and Maud is a great puzzle, too. She met Nancy Smith very often when she first came, but never took a speck of notice of her until somehow she found out that Nancy cared for Dick, and lately she's sought her out, made much of her, and has her counted in in everything that goes on.

Dick ignores Nancy in the kindest possible way—which sounds paradoxical. He never goes there, though he has been asked many a time since he came home ; and her father has taken pains to let him know that it would please him if Dick would drop in. I don't believe Dick has a suspicion that Nancy's poor little breast is palpitating with love for him, but I see it in her eyes, and it hurts me. I never thought a pretty time would come for Nancy, with her red hair, and wide mouth, her uneasy manners and furious blushes, but it has ; she is just sixteen, and looks like a sweet wild rose, so lovely in its unfolding, but fading so pitifully soon.

Maud went over for Nancy right after tea,

and the boys arriving before they did, Taylor went with Ted to meet them; and a fine contrast the two girls made, walking along with arms around each other's waists, the best points of both being brought out in strong relief.

Taylor was very attentive to Nancy, seemed quite taken with her, and she brightened up and talked more and better than I ever heard her. I caught many a wistful glance cast toward my corner where Dick sat looking happy and interested, but saying little.

We had a gay little supper, sitting a long time and chattering like magpies, laughing at everything and nothing like giddy children, and eating like boarding-school girls.

"Give you my word, I'd like to sit here all night," said Billy, as we rose to leave the table. "Outch!"—gasping—"what's taken the small of my back, I wonder? and what-the-crick has got into my underpinnings? I never felt so done in all my life, for a fact."

"It's the riding," said I.

"And the walking," Maud supplemented.

"And the tramping through orchards, over stubble fields, and through the woods," added Dick.

"And getting your feet wet last night."

"And driving for six hours yesterday after a train journey, and eating no tea."

"And maybe the hop-skip-and-jumping we did on the lawn after dinner, helped," finished Billy, holding his back and making rueful faces. "Anyhow, I'm about put out of action."

I whispered to Ted to hitch up Brownie to the waggon; he and the girls could drive to Grays' with the boys, and drop Nancy at her home on the way back. I felt badly for the poor, weak city chap, made to work so hard at enjoying himself that he was aching in every bone. Maud made fun of him, as was to be expected; but he said he was much obliged for my kindness, for, though he *could* walk ten miles if necessary, he wouldn't take one step if he could help it. However, he refused with utter disdain to sit on a pillow I handed him, but Maud tucked it behind his back.

I wasn't a bit surprised to see Dick come in alone next morning, Taylor being too stiff to stir, and the mid-day picnic we'd been preparing for had to be given up. Dick proposed instead to drive us down to the lake shore; the waggonette would hold six, so we could take Nancy if we chose—for Taylor's camping party was expected to arrive in Dunston next day, and Taylor wanted to select a location.

We took baskets and kettles to have a corn-roast and a gipsy tea, and we were a very merry party; even Dick became gay, when Maud insisted upon Nancy sitting with him going down, "So that I can have you coming back," she whispered, in explanation.

She carried on shockingly with Taylor in the back seat, and Dick's piercing eye shot many a glance at them over my head and Ted's, and he absolutely refused either to stop or drive back for Billy's cap which Maud had thrown into the road. And when Billy snatched off Ted's hat and pretended to throw it out also, Dick would not even look back, but drove straight on.

I have a forty-acre farm right on the lake shore, rented to an accommodating man, and we drove there for our picnic, for I knew he wouldn't make a fuss over a bit of a bonfire, and some farmers would. Billy found right there what he pronounced "a bully camping ground," in the lee of a bluff, where a rapid little stream chatters down through a narrow bit of a valley that leads out to a fine stretch of beach. We had the jolliest kind of a supper, making our fire on the sands where there was driftwood lying all about, bleached white and dry; and afterward we rested under the trees at the top of the bluff, which, a little beyond, arose

into quite a cliff, almost sheer from the water. It was a lovely scene, the smiling country behind us, the green grass and trees around, and in front a wide expanse of open lake, deep blue, sparkling, shimmering, breaking into silvery waves on the strand. Out far, a shred of smoke and a black spot showed where a saucy tug was convoying great white-sailed schooners. I breathed a deep sigh of delight, and said how lovely it would be to live right there.

Billy Taylor and Maud laughed, and Maud said: "Isn't she sweet? I knew she'd love to come," and then they asked me wouldn't I join the camping party—Ted, too, and Hannah, if I liked—to chaperone Maud and Nancy. They'd get a big tent with spring stretchers and every comfort and convenience, and I'd be charmed, they knew I would.

I didn't think they were in earnest, or seriously meant it, but I meant it seriously when I refused, which I did absolutely, not a bit of doubt or hesitation about it; said I wouldn't even think of it, which I wouldn't, and didn't, and won't.

"Auntie Tadpole, if you ain't the worst spoil-sport! You don't know how lovely the Hamilton boys are—ten of them, all my most particular friends—think of the possibilities for

Nancy and me with five a-piece! My heart's been set upon it ever since I left home, and now you've gone and broken it!"

"Is Dick going?"

"Mercy me, no! What would I be doing with Dick and ten other boys, when he's one too many for me when we're alone? He wouldn't come, he's not been asked, and I don't want him, so there! I'm into this for fun."

And yet it seemed to me, as they sat side by side in front of me going home, that there was love and happiness, as well as a strange peace, in the face that was turned up to meet Dick's earnest gaze. They looked at each other a great deal, but spoke little as we bowled along, driving by little-frequented, back roads that would take us quite five miles out of our way; but the early evening was perfect, and the clouds in the west were ablaze with colour.

Ted and I were making up stories of where we would travel when we got rich; Billy Taylor was playing "This little pig went to market" with Nancy's hands; when Dick drew in at the top of a steep hill to listen if a train approached —for the railway crossed the road at the foot of the hill, and there was a sharp curve and a deep cutting, which prevented a view of the

track. Dick listened, but hearing no sound drove on, slowly and carefully, down the rough slope, when suddenly we heard three sharp toots of the locomotive, and Dick lashed out at the team with all his might. As we reached the rails I saw the great monster, drawing the fast express, right upon us, and Ted and I crouched forward, feeling sure the back of the waggonette could not escape. I don't know how many feet or inches we had to spare, but we cleared it, and up the sandy hill on the other side, like demons, tore the frenzied team.

None of us spoke. My arm was around Teddy, and when Dick brought the team into a walk, I saw that Billy was holding Nancy tight in his arms with one of his hands pressing her face close against his breast; Maud had not moved, except to shrink down into her place and to clasp Dick's arm with her hand. There was just the drawing of a breath between us and destruction, but we had escaped unhurt.

"The wind must have been against us; I certainly did not hear a sound of the train," said Dick, in quite his ordinary voice. "They deferred their warning whistle rather long; it should sound before they enter the cut."

Nancy was crying, and Billy was wiping her

wet, white face with his handkerchief. Maud's hand still lay on Dick's sleeve.

"It's a very pretty hand," said Dick, looking down at it. "I like to see it there very well, but you should never touch a driver's arm when he's busy. You ought to know that."

She drew it away sharply. "I did not do it because it was yours, and you need not be afraid I shall do it again; I dare say this will be our last drive together."

"It might easily have been our last. You should not have seized my arm."

"I did not pull it or interfere with your hold. I'm ashamed enough of being scared, without being scolded for it," she returned angrily.

"My dear girl, you weren't half as frightened as I was, and I was responsible for the danger I had brought you into. But you must *never* interfere with a driver's arms or touch the lines; if you had pulled a pound we might have been back there, on the track, now. And I might just add that you have the most powerful pinch of any one I have yet encountered."

"I hope you are black and blue. I'd like to pound you. Berating me like this when you ought to be holding my fainting form, and calling upon me to 'look up and speak to you, just once more.' Ugh, I do so hate you!"

We heard every word of this, and I do think it was unfeeling of Dick, but I dare say he wanted to teach her to sit tight and hold on to her own hands when she's afraid.

They certainly are the most perverse pair I ever saw. The way she and Billy carried on all that evening was downright shocking, but Dick didn't seem to mind it a bit. Dick is making her unhappy, and she is breaking Dick's heart. If they love each other, why—— And if they don't love each other, why—— It's a riddle, and I give it up, but I surely am in sore trouble over them.

CHAPTER XIX

I CANNOT always be worrying about Maud—I have troubles of my own. Mr Jones is getting to be a terrible nightmare.

He comes, and he comes, and he keeps a-coming.

Sometimes he doesn't so much as ask for Teddy, but I always tell him. I hang on to Ted as a drowning man might to a life-belt. I keep the conversation pinned down to Ted, and when I can't think of another thing to tell about him I give a list of all he's had to eat since his father last saw him.

He's taken to bringing me things—oranges, little screwed-up papers of peppermints, fashion papers, a mashed bag of chocolates, a square of honey, even pea-nuts, loose from his pocket.

He says, "Sweets to the sweet," and I say, "Yes, Ted likes trash," and I put them away for him.

He gets to be very pressing about how I'm

feeling, if I find myself quite well, or is the weather debilitating.

I should love it to debilitate him, but he's looking right well, almost plump, for a man that's all knobs and knuckles.

He's a decent man—that's the worst any one could say of him—but the sight of him begins to give me spasms. I have been down-right rude to him more than once, but he seems to enjoy it—think's it's only my short, frank way, and I'm treating him friendly-like.

It was to get rid of him for perhaps a clear week that I sent Maud and Ted down the side line to stay a few days with my cousin Hiram. I had Ted write to his father saying not to come here, but if he wanted to see Ted to go down to Hiram's, where they'd be real glad to have him (which I hope wasn't a lie).

It was Friday morning they left, and I was making good use of the quiet with a big pile of household linen to mend, which I had been saving up until I could have a full, free day for it. I was beautifully at it, as happy and contented as you please, when I heard the side gate click, and a light step on the walk, and before I could do more than sigh, in came Mrs Scott.

I've never been one to neighbour much, but I've had to a lot more than I like since the Scotts moved down from the farm and went to live in the house next to Shanklins' on the main road.

City people don't know what neighbouring means. It means borrowing. It means running in any time. It means coming into a body's house the back way, without knocking. It means having your lawn-mower and clippers, your tubs and clothes pegs, your wringer and boiler, your wheel-barrow and step-ladder, your saw-horse and curtain stretchers down to somebody else's place. It means trying to keep track of loaned cups of sugar, rashers of bacon, bowls of lard, drawings of tea, pans of flour, pots of cream—not to speak of half loaves of bread, cans of milk, pats of butter, nutmegs, nails, spools of thread and such that they wouldn't demean you by paying back.

It means having company when you want to be alone, having remarks made about your clothes—how unbecoming your new bonnet is, and how badly your dress fits at the back, where you can't see it yourself; and maybe an occasional frank reference as to how you're falling off in looks and how your figure is changing.

All those things I could bear—and I have to—if only they wouldn't be inquisitive. Neighbours are apt to be afflicted with curiosity; they are a deal fonder of minding your business than they are of attending to their own.

It's because of what I have suffered from too-friendly neighbours that has brought me down to having few friends, few that are close enough to give me pieces of their mind, and plain talk for my own good. The people that talk plain to you for your own good are nice people to avoid. It is avoiding them has given me the name of being queer.

But Mrs Scott hasn't been easy to discourage; she's so easy-going and so limp it's hard to make an impression on her, and she's sort of kind-hearted and good-natured, generally. She does run out of things shockingly, which shows she's a poor manager; she's small on most things, but she's vast on borrowing.

She's awful to get out of tea.

They sell tea and many another thing at the corner store, which she passes on her way here, but she says it would ruin any one to deal there, they charge so high, and she'd rather run bills in town.

I use good, high-priced, black tea, and in returning what she borrows Mrs Scott gives me

greeny-grey, cheap Japan, which tastes like wet straw flavoured with quinine. But Hannah gets round her by saving up the returns in a separate caddy, and then lending her back out of her own lot. It works beautifully, only the caddy will get empty, and she has a treat of good tea until we can save up her stock and begin again.

I wish she wouldn't bring over samples of things she bakes, for she expects me to eat them before her face, full or empty, and rather than hurt her feelings I have risked many a pain. I hate piecing at the best of times, and I'm not to say fond of other folks' cooking.

Mrs Scott sat down, and began telling me the news of the neighbourhood, holding a little tin pail in her lap, so I knew she wanted something moist. She said she had a favour to ask —she wouldn't ask everybody, for she couldn't trust everybody with it, but she could trust me. Her sister out at New Salem was sick, and she'd got the promise of a lift over there, and would take one of the boys, and the other would stay home with his father, but she could not take the baby, because her sister's complaint was all nerves, and having young twins of her own she wouldn't want another baby, of course, and I could have the lend of him until to-morrow afternoon, if I'd be so kind.

"I don't practice borrowing much," I said grimly, "and I don't believe I want to begin on babies."

"Ha—ha!" she laughed, "you are so funny, you always put things *the queerest*. But I really don't know where to turn unless you'll take him. I want to go so much, and maybe she won't *keep sick* long enough for me to get another chance."

"Oh, well, to oblige you, Mrs Scott, I'll do my best with the child, but it isn't just what I'd undertake from choice."

"Well, you're a lot more obliging than Martha Shanklin—Mrs Switzer, I mean—for she said out and out she wouldn't be bothered with anybody's baby. Switzer laughed at her, and told me to send him down to the mill and he'd mind him—Switzer just dotes on babies, and never had one of his own. And Martha's house looks lovely, doesn't it? The scrim curtains that I helped her make, look as nice as *real lace*, and will do up a deal easier. I do think Martha might have put herself about to oblige me, but she's so selfish, and I knew I could depend on you. If you had refused, which I was sure you wouldn't, I'd have had to trail all the way over to Mrs Paterson's, and she being the pastor's wife would *have had to*."

"Mrs Paterson has plenty of that kind of company of her own; I'm as glad to save Mrs Paterson as to serve you."

"Oh, that's all right, so long as baby has good care I'm happy," Mrs Scott said, settling herself down quite contented. Then she went back to Martha and her house, and all she had in it, and some things she hadn't. "And I am *that surprised*," she said, "that Martha has such a tidy house, for she has no gift for housekeeping, and a more upset house than the Shanklins' I'd hate to see. I was so glad when the wedding came off *at last*. The date was postponed *three times*; I was so afraid she wasn't going to get him. It was too bad of him to keep her waiting like that, and her farewell calls made *and all*."

"Mrs Scott," said I, "did it never strike you that perhaps Martha put him off?" And she allowed it never did.

I thereupon took up my parable and talked. "I like married women well enough," said I, "but they seem mostly to have the idea that every one that is single is in that blessed state because she can't help it. They can't seem to believe there could be such a thing as an old maid staying so without a wish to be otherwise—happy, contented spinsters without a single crack in their hearts, who have refused to

listen to any inducements to make a change. Being married may be all well enough, but there are plenty of folks who don't hanker after that kind of a life."

"Well," Mrs Scott remarked, laughing, "from all I hear *your* hankerings will soon be over."

"If I ever had any, they were over so long ago I've forgotten them."

"Oh, you needn't try to look *innocent*," she said, shaking her forefinger at me roguishly; "you'll be going off before long. And I don't blame you *one bit*."

"I have no notion of going off anywhere; I am quite comfortably situated."

"Oh, of course you'll deny it, but you might as well own up. He's a *real decent* man; you may feel proud if you can get him."

"Get him? Get what?" I asked, preparing to be very, very mad.

"You know. Mr Jones, of course."

"If it's Mr Jones you're calling a decent man, you're probably right—nobody ever said a worse thing of him than that, to my knowledge. But I'd thank you not to mention him in connection with me."

"Oh, come now, Polly Wogg; you know *well enough* you'll marry him when he asks you, and the best thing possible for you both. He's

unsettled and unhappy without a home, the children scattered all over the country, you so fond of the boy and burying *the girl* and everything, and with this big place and no one to look after it. Why, I call it a providence——”

“Call it impudence, and you'd be nearer the mark,” I said, just ready to boil over, but she went on quite pleased with herself.

“Yes, just a *special providence*; all he's got to do is come in and hang up his hat, and *there you are!* Didn't we see, late on Saturday night, him sitting with you and Ted in the front room, and the house *all lighted* up—he in his blacks and you with a pink bow in your hair, all as cosy as *could* be, just like one family; and didn't he stay over Sunday——”

“No, he didn't,” I interrupted, “he went directly after breakfast. He came so late the night before I couldn't turn him out to sleep in the road, for he said the horse was too tired to travel another yard. If you had watched us closely by day as you did by night you might have seen him striking off towards his brother's on the second concession early Sunday morning. I had the lamps lighted before he came, and it wouldn't have improved matters to turn them out, would it? Do you think I've come to my time of life to marry a man just because I've

taken in his boy, or because he's a decent man? I've seen churchfuls of decent men that I wouldn't marry. I have no inclination for marriage, nor yet for turning my house into an orphan asylum. If I haven't refused Mr Jones it's because he hasn't asked me; I give him credit for more sense than to do that."

"Oh, I don't reckon you'll refuse him, but he'll ask you, don't *you* fear. My man was joking him at the market the other day, and he spoke real confident of coming here to live, and said he hadn't had a *happy* day since he moved to town, and was thinking of making big improvements here, and putting the ten-acre field all into fruit trees. He says they'll *do well*, because the hill cuts off the east wind and the bush shelters the north. Everybody's talking about it; people seem to think more about you than they do about Miss M'Gregor and Dick Gray. Oh, you *needn't fret*; it's as good as done if you work your cards right—and lucky you'll be to get such a kind, steady man."

Will any one please tell me what any one could do with a woman like that? No amount of Bible oaths would convince her, and I'm not used to using any other kind. I felt savage enough to have spanked her baby, but when the oldest boy brought it over in a go-cart, made

out of a soap-box on wheels, I was as good as pie to him—I wouldn't have had him start crying for a good deal !

I won't forget Mrs Scott for her neighbourly words, and I'll pay Mr Jones out for them ! Going about telling how he'll improve my place—*my place* ! The next time he comes here with a long face to see his orphan boy, I'll show him ! And to think of Mrs Scott watching the house to see who comes and goes : she sure has been rewarded by seeing fine doings with Maud and all the young people of the district. That one time was the only time Mr Jones ever came after dark, and I told him straight it was inconvenient having him stay over-night ; but says he, " Anything will do for me ;" so I said, " I don't like men visitors, and that's the truth, but as you'll be going right after breakfast I'll manage this once."

I felt then as if he'd made up his mind to make me uncomfortable and ridiculous. I dislike him, I can't stand him, I never could. He's that uninteresting and wet-blankety. He's as flat as pancakes with the soda left out, and he has creepy, fidgety ways. He rubs his horny hand over his raspy chin, making a scratchy noise ; he draws his breath through his teeth, and rubs his boots together till they

screech aloud ; and when he calls me "My dear Miss Wogg," it fairly makes me sick.

It's all his fault that the district is gossiping about me ; but, dear me, you'd think the ones who know me least would know I'd never take him, instead of thinking I'd be lucky if I could work my cards so as to get him !

My heart didn't warm any toward the Scott baby ; I was glad enough when Hannah grabbed him up and took him to the kitchen under her arm. She handled him exactly like a sack of flour, but it seemed to please him amazingly, and when she drew out the under drawer of the dresser and put him in it, blew up half-a-dozen grocery bags, tying strings around their necks and hanging them to the knobs of the upper drawers, you never saw a child so tickled in all your life. He hit at them, grabbed at them, punched them, as they dangled before him like young balloons, and the way he laughed, whether he hit or missed, would have surprised his mother. For she taught him to cry for her the first day, and he hasn't learned anything from her since.

Now and again I'd hear Hannah say : "That's right, laugh—it's a fine thing for your di-jester," going on with her work just as if he wasn't there. And by and by, when, from sheer tiredness of

fun, he dropped asleep in the corner of the drawer, Hannah pulled him into position and covered him, and there he slept until after I'd had my tea.

She said she'd have him sleep with her, because he might bother me with his "ructions," but he needn't try any games with her, for she could sleep through a barn-raising. I never can tell for certain whether Hannah sees or guesses what I'd like done and does it from the goodness of her heart, or whether she hits on it by chance, but the fact is she comes to my rescue constantly, and in so off-hand a way that it seems more like magic than anything else. She looks so stolid, so imperturbable, so indifferent, that one mightn't give her credit for any fine feelings or intuitions, but I think she has them, and lives up to them.

She seems to know that I love to have the house to myself, though I'm sure I never gave anybody a hint of it, for when Ted and Maud happen to be out, both at once, she always asks if she can't go out to tea, or asks to be let take herself off somewhere where she professes to be very anxious to go.

Saturday afternoon she asked to be let return the borrowed baby, which hadn't been sent for

up to four o'clock, and then to stay out until bed-time.

I was very glad, for I'd let what Mrs Scott said bother me a lot more than it was worth, and nothing so helps me to get over things as a long spell alone, when I can face them and think them out, and quiet them.

By evening, which came in early with a cold rain and wind, I was myself again, and ready to turn to and enjoy myself. There's a fire-place in the dining-room, not a nice, fashionable grate, but a big hungry hole with brass dogs to hold the wood. It seems silly to want a fire in August, but there certainly was a chill in the air, and if my ancestors weren't fire-worshippers they must have been Red Indians, for I dearly love a blaze, and it's only lately I've given up sitting on the floor from choice, and I'd do it now, only I feel rheumatism staring me in the back.

It wasn't ten minutes after the idea came to me before I had a fire snapping and crackling, and a fine fervour of happiness begun to wrap me 'round. There was a nice new book that I'd been saving up—I hadn't even begun it, only gloatingly had run over the pages with a quick glance here and there; there was the weekly paper no more than turned over with the local

page outside ; and, by great good luck, there were some nuts and raisins, which I do love to nibble at while I read. I put the windows wide up—it was beginning to feel warm already—drew down the blinds, cracked a plate of nuts and stemmed the raisins, lighted two lamps (for I like more light than I used to, when I read), brought my nicest easy-chair in front of the fire, put my slippered feet on a hassock, and laid out to have a right happy time.

It was lovely ; I was enjoying it slowly, now reading an item of news, now taking a nut or a raisin, then looking at the blazing logs and thinking after all it would be nice to have winter come again. There was the cosy shut-in feeling stealing over me that never comes in summer—a solid-comfort feeling, that no veranda or hammock, no moon or sunlit sward could give, a relaxing, soothing——

“ Rap,” went the knocker on the side veranda door.

My, but it made me jump ! and if my face didn’t lengthen two inches and darken ten shades, feelings are no guide at all.

I knew it wasn’t Dick, because Peter Amos Snider had come over at noon to say his mother had sent for Dick to go to Baxters’ to fetch her home ; I hadn’t heard the gate or a footstep or

anything, and hardly any people who run in ever use the knocker, they just tap on the door and call out, "Are you in?" or, "It's only me."

I had a scarey feeling that was unusual, so I took the lamp in my hand when I went to open the door.

It was Mr Jones.

"I hope I find you very well to-night, ma'am," he said. I hate to be called "ma'am" almost as much as I do "miss."

"Well," I returned, "I can't deny but I'm having particularly good health. How are you?"

I held the door open just a little and stood in the crack, not asking him in, or letting him so much as look in.

"I'm suffering from a cold, a summer cold. I'll just step in out of the damp. It's misting a good deal."

"You ought not to have come out in the wet, if you have a cold. Ted isn't here; he wrote you he was going to Hiram's."

"It's a bad night, as you say" (which I hadn't said any such thing), "wet and chilly, and getting worse." He sat down on the edge of a hard chair, took off his old, tall hat—a drab plug with a black band around it—unbuttoned his greeny-grey waterproof coat and his greeny-

black double-breasted frock-coat, to haul a big red handkerchief out of his insidemost pocket; and after he got it out, he wiped off his brow, slow and careful, as if it had been a cracked glass dish that he was afraid of breaking, but which needed a deal of polishing.

I had to put the lamp down and take a chair; I thought he'd never get done attending to his brow, but it was a stiff-backed chair, and I sat in it very straight up.

"I'm sorry you came, with Ted away," I said plainly, "because I wanted to be by myself for a few days. I get few chances of being alone lately."

"I am glad to find you alone. I am staying the night in the neighbourhood, and dropped in on purpose to see you alone."

I let that information fall and grow cold on the air, and said nothing.

He mopped his brow some more and put away his handkerchief, as if interring a long-loved friend. "I—I'll lay off my coat, if you have no objections. Your fire is—is somewhat hot, if I may say so."

"Expecting to be alone I built it to please myself," I replied.

"Oh, I like it, even though unseasonable," he said, as he stepped into the hall and hung up

his coat and hat. Coming back he sat down in my easy-chair, wiped his brow once more with the greatest care, patted down his side-locks that he brings up from behind his ears to cover the bald spot on top, and began to rub his hands and beam, as nearly as he could, like Moses on the Mount, stretched his feet out toward the fire, and sort of swelled out his skin and bones with satisfaction.

“This is my idea of comfort,” he said, glinting at me. “This is what I like (even though a little unseasonable). This suits me; I would give all I possess for such a home as this.”

“That’s not offering much,” thinks I, “your possessions being small.”

“You could rent a house in town easily enough with an open fire-place,” I remarked aloud.

“Very true,” he returned, making a Gothic church with his hands, “but the best house in the world would not be the home I crave unless *you* were in it.”

“Oh,” I cried, taken dreadfully aback, “don’t say such a thing to me! I won’t stand talk of that kind.”

“I must say it. I came to say it, and nothing’s a-going to stop me. I came for that purpose often before and let circumstances turn

me from it, but you can't stop me this time. I know you are superior to many of the weaknesses of your sex ; you are independent by nature, you pride yourself on being able to tread life's pathway alone, but you're a woman, you're but a woman—you know not the peace—the peace and safety there is in being surrounded by the love and care of a strong man."

"That's very true—I don't know, and I don't want to know."

This made him pause, for I said it very emphatically, and I rose in my wrath and put another log on the fire that was too hot already.

"I would have been glad to do that for you," Mr Jones said, "if you had let me know in time. I should be glad to be of use to you. There—there is nothing I wouldn't do for you, except to keep my love unspoken any longer. I've been acquainted with you for a matter of some years. I've seen you in various circumstances, and you have won my undying respect. For years I have esteemed and rev—reverenced you, afar off, and since I lost my late lamented partner I have learnt to love you—learnt to love you for your goodness of heart, your sympathy for the afflicted, and—and, in short, for those qualities of mind and person which have endeared you to count—to countless—millions——"

"Oh, come now," I interrupted, laughing, "not so many as that."

"Yes, yes, I repeat it—countless millions—millions. You have endeared yourself to count—" With that he stuck fast, forgetting the speech he had evidently prepared, and began a fresh polish of his face, that now needed it if it never had before. He tried also to flatten down his locks of hair, but patting was useless. One had come loose, and nothing short of gum-stickative would make it keep up. There it was, standing out stiff and lop-lapping down over one ear, nodding in the knowingest way every time he moved a speck.

He dropped his hanky, but was afraid to stoop for it, fearing the other lock would come loose. I knew I couldn't stand another, if he could, so I muttered something about being thirsty, and went to the kitchen and stayed a long while, making a frantic noise with the dipper and the water-pail. I took in a pitcher of water and some glasses when I went back, and was glad to see that he'd subdued his gymnastic hair, though it was still at a bad slant, had picked up his hanky, and looked more composed.

He seemed glad of the water, and took a long, gulpy time drinking it. Then he took

hold of the seat of the chair with both hands and made a fresh start.

“Mr Jones, please say no more; it’s very painful to me to listen, and it’s no use, it really isn’t,” I said earnestly; but he went right on, as if I’d never spoken.

“I have learned to love you, Miss Wogg—Mary—may I call you Mary? I love you intensely, ex-ex—I love you very much indeed, with a love—a love that will last through time, and on into the boundless ages of eternity, if we’re both spared. You are the load—load—the loadstone—no, the loadstar of my existence, the apple of my eye, and without you, I’d—I’d——” He could remember no more of his speech, so he came down to commonplaces, and said very earnestly: “I really and truly love you, Miss Mary. I would be downright heart-broken if you wouldn’t have me. I have felt this way so long, and I’ve worked myself up to asking you, Miss Mary, and it’s been fearfully hard. But I want you, I want you to marry me, worse than I ever wanted anything before, that I do.”

The first part had seemed like play-acting, and it had not come anywhere near touching me, but now it seemed real, and I began to shake.

"I'm right sure you mean well, Mr Jones," I murmured, in a small voice, "but it isn't any use, I couldn't do it. I don't want to hurt you, but I really couldn't; I couldn't really, no way at all."

"You're taken by surprise, maybe," he said soothingly. "Don't answer at all. There's lots of time, don't answer in a hurry. Take your time, think about it—take an hour, a week, any length of time; but think about it, don't refuse me off-hand. Now, don't," he pleaded, for I had tried to speak, "don't, now!"

"I want you to think about it. Perhaps you feel that because you haven't got married all these years, you never ought to, but you should. You're just the sort of woman to make a man happy; and you will, I'm sure you will.

"You'd have a usefuller life and a happier, with a husband to take care of you and look after your affairs, and with the children you'd never be lonely——"

"I like being lonely."

"Then you should be alone all you liked, I'd see to that. And you could travel around, as I've heard you say you'd like to, and have somebody left at home to see everything went right. I believe, if you'd think of it, you could be fond of me; I think I've seen signs that

you're fond of me now. I do really, Mary. I ain't conceited, but I'm sure I've seen signs. Perhaps you didn't ever give it a thought, but it struck me likely you were interested in me when you were so good to my poor wife and took the baby. And when you took Ted I was sure of it. I knew you were coming to favour me, when you took on so about losing Annie."

"Then you were quite wrong," I burst out, indignant, and sore too; "I don't favour you, and I ain't fond of you! And I'd thank you not to speak of Aggie or—or anybody. It only makes me feel hard to you, and I want to feel sorry. I don't like you at all, if you must know. And I never wanted anybody's boys—I took Ted because of my little Blessing, and because he had a hard master, and I'm fond of him now, in spite of his being a boy. But I don't want, and I won't have, any man around looking after my affairs, and I won't look after him. I'm very well as I am, and you have deceived yourself if you really thought I wanted you. I'm much upset, when I suppose I should only feel obliged for your good opinion. You never had the least grounds for thinking I'd have you."

"That's where our opinions differ—but let that pass. I think still that you *are* fond of

me, but let that pass, too. Won't you marry me, anyhow, and try to be fond of me? You'd get to be. I'd be awful kind and thoughtful. I'd be so proud of you—for you are smart; you're much superior to me, I know that. But I'd never interfere or be in your way; and as for the boys, you could have them for company or send them to boarding-school—I'd never cross you. Whatever you said I'd know would be the right thing. I've built so on having you, Mary; don't refuse me—just leave it so, and marry me some day, even if it's a far day."

"Mr Jones, I really couldn't. I couldn't think of it for a minute. I don't even want to. Probably I ought to be sorry I don't want to, but I don't, neither now nor any other time. This is final, and the very last of it. I feel no drawing to you nor to married life; I feel very sorry, indeed, that you feel as you say you do, but I have to say no."

He looked at me as if he were weighing something, a queer, sort of a sneering look, which I didn't understand and didn't like.

"You'll be lonesomer than you think, all by yourself," he said solemnly. "You'll feel the loss of Teddy."

"Oh, it's nothing to do with Teddy," I

exclaimed. "I'll keep him just the same; it shan't make any difference to him."

"Yes, it will; I won't let him stay where his father is despised, where he'll be taught to despise his father. I'll take him away. I'd take him to-night if I could. No son of mine shall eat the bread of charity. I'd never have let you have him, only I thought it was out of affection and regard for me you took him. I have too much pride to leave him here."

I must say this was a shock to me; it scattered my wits, I didn't know what to answer. Only one thing I knew, I couldn't let Teddy go. Why, Teddy was a part of my home, I had his future and his present all mapped out. I didn't remind him of the five other boys scattered around the country kept by folks who could ill afford it, five that he could have and be entirely welcome. Of course it was spite, a paltry revenge, but I mustn't let it fall hardest on my poor Teddy-boy.

I reasoned with him, I argued and protested. I told him how I always kept Teddy from forgetting his mother, and taught him to respect and obey his father. I told him I'd keep the boy in comfort, train him, educate him, let him choose his profession or business, and if

I should die, would provide well for him. Mr Jones drew down his long upper lip—it's ill arguing against a long upper lip—and said : “If I stay, Ted stays, not else.” I asked what could he do with a boy, having no settled home, and Ted wasn't one that liked discomforts ; and how miserable he was when he first came to me a poor, ill-fed, abused boy. He was happy with me, and getting on so well—I begged even with tears, I offered to buy him, but move that man I couldn't.

I looked at him, and if it wasn't hate I felt I hope I may never get nearer it.

He said he'd rather starve, and much rather Ted should, than leave him where his father had been rejected with scorn. He said he would go down to Hiram's next day and get him.

Then it was I who begged for time ; I asked him to consider it, to think it over, not to decide for, say, six months or so.

He laughed. “I asked you to take time to consider, and you refused.”

“Mr Jones, I know I refused, and it's open to you to refuse if you like ; but for your son's sake I don't think you will.”

“I will agree, if you will also leave my proposal an open question for one month ;

but I warn you if you want Ted you will also have to take me."

"I will not act the hypocrite and pretend what I don't mean—no, not even for Ted's sake; but if you leave things as they are for a month I will say 'Thank you.'"

"I will so far oblige you. I am yours always to command," he said in a very "lord of creation" tone.

And there it was left.

The wind is all out of my toy balloon, the ground has dropped out of my Eden and I've fallen through. I could laugh over being utterly routed by Mr Jones, only there is nothing left in me but groans.

I had no writings with Ted, as I had with Annie; I didn't believe anybody would ever want a boy, and I'd have thought they'd be heartily welcome to him if they had.

What a poor thing I am, what a self-deceiver! I've let myself get bound up in that queer, odd-looking, funny little chap, and I never knew it. It isn't for his sake only I want to keep him, it's far more for my own. To think of sobbing and crying till I'm fairly sick at losing a Jones boy!

But I wouldn't marry Mr Jones for all the boys this side of yonder.

CHAPTER XX

It's wonderful what a help our pastor is when I go to church in any trouble.

He's not what you'd call an overly bright man, and having that throat affection he's obliged to take his emphasis out of the pulpit cushion with his fists, but for getting right down to your heart and easing it, I never saw any one who could beat Mr Paterson.

It was a very solemn sermon. There he stood in the old closed-in pulpit with the square, flat sounding-board above his head, against a background of a rich crimson, a satiny paper all over big palm leaves and cabbage roses, that you could only see the outline of because they were all one colour. It was only the back of the pulpit that was papered, between the grained wood-work of the sounding-board supports, the rest of the walls were plain whitewash, none too white. The big platform surrounding the pulpit was of painted boards that concealed the baptistery,

and from the sloping reading-desk with its fat pillow descended two immense crimson tassels—these, and the pulpit paper, were our chief objects of pride. We weren't at all proud of the straight stiff pews that had lately had the doors unscrewed as a concession to fashion, nor of the tall frosted windows that let a cruel light in upon our minister's sallow face and his aged garments of greenish black, and made every defect everywhere so prominent.

There were titters from the easily moved in the little congregation, because the two big box stoves that usually stood one on each side of the door, had had an untimely removal since the Sunday before. All spring and summer they had stood unsightly in their growing brownness waiting the convenient season for attention, which had evidently come late on Saturday, for there stood the zinc foundations, there the wood-boxes half full of wood, and up aloft, wandering aimlessly from nothing into nothing, straggled the long lengths of rusting stove pipes, each with three little shiny tin pails hanging, pendant, where they were expected to do most good in case of drippings that sometimes came. The night before, darkness had probably come and interrupted the work that should have been done in April. The janitor, who was a

lady, and went out plain-sewing by the day, must also have been belated, for the lamps, which should have occupied the tarnished rings in front of the reflectors between each window, were absent.

The spectacle of the stove pipes was what held the attention all through the opening hymn and the first prayer, but before the time came for the text, Mr Paterson, by a supreme effort, wrested victory from the pipes and drew every wandering thought to himself first, and then higher.

His text was, "He remembereth we are dust," and the funny application of it only stayed with me a minute, while the memory of the sermon is with me yet.

It is so good to feel sure in this forgetful world that there is One "Who remembereth."

I felt soothed and composed, though humbled, and by Monday morning was ready to face the world again, with its little round of duties; ready to face Ted, as if nothing had happened, when he and Maud came home, fairly wild with spirits, along in the afternoon.

They didn't see any change in me, though it truly felt like dislocating my jaw to laugh at their stories and jokes. Hiram had driven them down to the lake shore to visit the Hamilton

boys' camp on Saturday morning, and they were full of it—their arrangements, how they cooked, and the fun they were having. They both tried to get me to talk about it, saying how much they wanted to join the party, but I said nothing. If you only can keep from talking at all, it saves so much useless argument.

Hannah whispered to Ted that his brown Bunny had five baby rabbits, and that excited him so he forgot all about camping. He engaged Maud to help him make enlarged quarters—Maud being a natural born carpenter—and they were at it still, hammer and nails, and both whistling, when Dick came at eight.

He looked so handsome, with his clean-shaved face, neat clothes and lovely hair, but so white and tired that I felt sorry for him. He had been working very hard during harvest, and I know having Taylor there and leaving his work to go for his mother, had put him back.

He would not let me call Maud, but threw himself in the hammock and talked to me. He looked at me intently, and he must have guessed I was troubled, for he was so sweet to me.

"I don't know how I could manage without you, Aunt Polly," he said, looking lovingly at me with his kind eyes, which always have a sad look in them. "You have taught me so

many things and have helped me so much. I am trying to be less selfish and to practise patience—which doesn't come natural to me. I remember your saying, 'Don't try to bear anything to-morrow, just bear it to-day, for changes are on the way ; they are only around the corner, and may face us by another dawn.' There is a great deal of comfort in your philosophy, 'That nothing lasts for ever, not even trouble,' and that no matter how trying circumstances are, they will change."

"Thank you for reminding me," I returned, smiling. "Do you think some of my own medicine might be good for me, Doctor?"

He only smiled in reply, and then went on to speak of how he had been trying not to cross his mother, trying to show her some of the love he felt for her, banishing, as much as possible, things debatable, and not coming to conclusions with her where it might be avoided. I could see she had been leading my poor Dick a life, and I knew how disagreeable it must have been for him at Baxters' over Sunday, when he had expected his mother to come back with him on Saturday night.

Maud came out before very long with a big apron of ticking over her mauve delaine dress, a hammer in one hand and a gimlet in the other.

"You here, Dick?" she said, with a careless nod. "Ted and I have to quit work for want of hinges. The new rabbit-hutch is all done but hanging the doors."

"Dick," called Ted, through the dining-room window, "what's the right name for baby rabbits?"

"What's the matter with calling them baby rabbits?"

"That's no name. Maud laughed at me for calling them pussies, and she says harelets is their proper name. Is it?"

"It's a good name. I never contradict anything Miss Maud says."

Maud had taken a chair beside the hammock, and was teasing Dick's hair with the gimlet. "Been busy?" she asked.

"Oh, dreadfully. I went to Dunston to drive my mother home on Saturday, and remained there a captive until this morning. I've done real work before and since."

"But none so hard as doing nothing, is that what you mean?"

Dick smiled, and then said: "By the way, I'll want your help to entertain a young lady guest. My mother has taken a great fancy to a ward of Jim Baxter's, and has invited her to visit us. She is coming the end of the week, and we

might have some picnics, corn-roasts or something, might we not?"

"We might indeed, it would be fun," said Maud.

"We'll help all we can," I remarked. "I did not know Jim had a ward."

"She's been at boarding-school since her mother died, but is now at Baxters'; her mother was Jim's aunt, and he was named in her will as executor, and guardian to Dora. There is considerable property, I believe."

"I never knew any of the Baxters except Jim, long ago, when he used to come courting your sister Effie."

"You must have heard of the Wings, though—old Squire Wing?"

"I don't recall—and yet the name of Wing seems very familiar—Oh, my—" I gasped and stopped. "Is—is her name Wing, Dick?"

"Yes, Aunt Polly—Dora Wing: a pretty, timid-looking little thing, very lonely in that household of staid old folks. She seemed to cling to mother, though I could hardly get her to speak to me."

"I'm not very partial to clingers, myself," said Maud. "I have a chum at home who is of the order of the vine, and it's when she's quietest you want to look out for her. That reminds

me that father is very apt to send for me almost any day now. Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised if I should get a telegram to-morrow."

I looked at her in amazement and Dick in distress, while Ted said: "G'on there! We won't let you go!"

"I can't stay for ever," she said, with a shake of her head, and began to talk of something else.

After I was in bed she came to me, saying: "Auntie, I'll have to go, you know. I'll telegraph to father to-morrow to send for me. I won't stay here and face that Wing girl. She would be sure to tell the story to Dick in a nasty way, and he'd get the truth out of me. I can't lie to Dick. He wouldn't like it; he hates practical jokes, and thinks larks are unwomanly. She'll make trouble; I feel it in my bones, and I'll take flight before she comes."

"It seems to me you make trouble enough with your Taylors and your Shanklins and general fool trash, not to mind what a mere girl could do."

"Oh, that—that's nothing at all. I ain't ashamed of fooling around a bit, and I know what Dick can stand, but he wouldn't see any fun in the Wing business. It would have

been all right if I'd told it myself, but it's too late for that now. It will give my heart a wrench to go—aye, verily will it; but I'm going, Aunt Polyanthus. If you have tears to weep, now's your time. Shall I bring you a basin? Or will you be good, and let us go camping and have my blessed society a while longer?"

CHAPTER XXI

TUESDAY morning Maud sent off a telegram to her father, but no reply had come up to Wednesday afternoon.

I had sent Ted to the post office about mail time, and, watching for him to come back, I saw him come slouching along, dragging his feet. Instead of coming to the house, he climbed the fence and cut across toward the back yard. I thought I could see papers and things sticking out of his jacket pocket, and, as he'd been a long time away, I was pretty impatient, but held in as long as ever I could before I called him. He took his own time coming, and his face, which was red and all streaky with tears, he kept turned away from me, thrusting a bunch of mail matter into my hands.

“ Any letters but these ? ”

“ That’s all for you.”

“ Any for Maud or you, Teddy ? ”

“ Just one, Auntie.” He sat down on the

edge of the veranda with his back to me and said nothing for a long time.

"He wants I should show you this letter—it's from my old man," he began. "I don't want nobody to see it—it makes me—'shamed. It—it ain't right, is it, Aunt Mary?—'tain't right he should want any wife but mother?"

I was struck dumb; to think he should tell a child a thing like that!

Ted's voice had the saddest, sorriest note in it, as he went on, scratching his heel up and down the boards, and never once looking around: "I never thought he was like that. I—I thought he was different. We don't want any old man around. You don't want him, do you?"

"Mercy me, no, Teddy!"

"He can't make you, kin he?"

"No."

"That's all right, then. I couldn't think you was out for a job like that." He looked around, his little face distorted with a grimace that was meant for a smile. "He needn't to come to our place for no stepmother for his kids."

"Teddy, did he—didn't he say anything about you?"

"Ye—es. He said being as I loved you already like a—a—mother, I could use my pro—

persuasions to g—git you for a real one. Oh, Aunt Polly, Aunt Polly, I don't want no realer one than you! I don't want no one in place of my own mother."

His head was down in my lap, and he was squirming in every joint to keep from crying aloud.

"Don't you worry, boy," I said soothingly; "I won't be your mother, I most really and truly won't. Nothing would make me, Teddy, nothing in this world. He's a good man for a father, remember that, a real good man; but I'm afraid he's going to be a trouble to us, if he wants to take you away."

"He needn't to try that—I won't go. He can't make me, can he?"

"I'm not right sure."

"Then he shan't. He hasn't anywhere to put me, and I don't want no hired boy's place at no farm any more. This place is good enough for me. We're happy, ain't we? You won't let me go, will you? Not whatever he says you won't, will you?"

I reassured him all I could, considering I had serious doubts. I am not sure just what Mr Jones may have said, but I think likely he gave Ted a hint of what he meant to do.

That evening a telegram came for Maud.

She handed it to me with the most tragic air in the world.

“Off to-night Lake St John—fishing. House shut up. Stay where you are.

“NEIL M‘GREGOR.”

After that I experienced some of the ways of girls. Having been one myself, you’d think I’d know something of them, but Maud has taught me better.

I saw afterward that she had taken me in hand, from the very first, to make me go camping—a thing I had never once thought of doing. Go camping late in August, with the days drawing in and all the fall work staring me in the face—pickling, jellying, preserving, not to speak of sewing! Go camping, when most of the pleasures of my life comes from a soft mattress, an easy-chair, and well-cooked, regular meals! Go camping with a lot of fool boys I don’t know, and flighty girls I know too well! Go camping, when all I care for is a quiet life and no interference—well, now, was it likely, while I held on to my reason? Not if I knew myself, and I thought I did.

But I didn’t know Maud. She began by being low-spirited and subdued. She didn’t argue. She had nothing to say. She never met me in the open where I could flatten her

out with a plain "No," and be done with it. There was no pitched battle, but guilefully she came sidling up, first on one side, then on the other, then in the rear, but always launching a dart at a weak spot. She cried softly to herself, she cried stormily to me, she sulked, she acted resigned but reproachful.

I thought then the siege was over, and was being thankful I had been strong-minded enough to resist, when she took me unawares by hanging to my neck and dampening my collar, saying her heart was broken—she could bear to lose Dick either by death or another girl, but she could not endure having him despise her. It wasn't any use for her to go away anywhere unless I went too; for Miss Wing would recognise me, and that would ruin her with Dick just the same. The long last of it was that I gave in, agreed to shut up the house and go, together with Maud, Ted, Hannah, Nancy Smith and a cousin of hers, a homely little country girl, who, Maud said, "wouldn't be a bit in the way."

Miss Wing was expected Saturday afternoon, and we got away that morning—Maud having made all arrangements and sent word to the campers to be ready for us; and worst of all, she had got Dick to drive us down with his

team, while Ted and Hannah brought most of our belongings in the waggon with Brownie. I would have Brownie stay with us, so that any time I couldn't stand it another minute, I could get away home.

Ten whole nights and eleven days we were in the camp, the young folks living like wild animals, when they weren't like mad Indians ; but as to what I went through I don't think I have language to describe—it would fill a book, and then leave lots untold and untellable ; but I came through alive, which was more than was to be reasonably expected.

It was coming near supper-time on the second Tuesday and I had wandered off, so I shouldn't see whose hands were mixing the dough or cutting up the meat—they took it in turns being chief cook, boys, girls, and all. I mostly managed to get out of sight, for what you don't see you can't be sure of, but when I do see I have to stay my stomach on biscuits out of a clean tin box, and that doesn't satisfy the appetite of even an unwilling camper.

I had walked nearly out to the road when I saw a man coming toward me across a field, and soon made out it was Dick. I gasped when I recognised him ; I felt sure he brought bad news, and my heart sank.

"Is it Maud's father?" I asked, when we met.

"No, Aunt Polly. It's mother. She's had a stroke, but is conscious and has asked for you—and—and she would like to see Maud."

"We'll go at once, dear. Who did you leave with her?"

"Dr Graham got a nurse last night, and Mrs Baxter came back with Peter Snider when he drove Dora Wing home. They are both there. It happened yesterday afternoon: she had driven into town alone on Saturday, and came home in a dangerously nervous state. I was afraid something would happen; I could not soothe her nor make her rest, and she would talk of things that almost put her into a frenzy. I found her after the stroke—she had reached up to a high shelf where she keeps a tin box with her papers, and the box was beside her and some documents in her hand. Dr Graham thinks she will get about again; some symptoms are certainly favourable."

All this he told me, and more, as we walked toward camp, and it was not long before Maud and I were with him in the surrey. Maud did not ask a question or say a word, only looked very sweetly at Dick and took the seat behind, leaving me to sit with the poor boy. We drove right to the Grays', and Maud for the first time

saw Dick's home, big, brown and sombre, with its square old porch and shuttered windows.

Mrs Gray was lying on the white pillow looking much as usual, neither very pale nor greatly marked with suffering, only when she spoke I could see a little drawing of the mouth to one side.

She did not wait for me to speak. The minute she saw me she said: "Send that old woman away. I won't have her here; she was cruel to my poor Effie!"

I could see the animosity of many years blaze up in the sunken eyes; there had been no intercourse between the families since Effie died, until lately, when Jim Baxter and Dick had patched up a peace; but what ground there had been for the bad feeling, I never knew.

The nurse, who had withdrawn herself, came to the bedside, saying soothingly: "You must not excite yourself, Mrs Gray. You shall not see Mrs Baxter again."

"I hear her voice now. I won't have her in my house, prying into my things and gloating over me. Send her away, Mary."

"Why, of course I will, she shall go at once," I said cheerily.

"Is she gone?" she asked, with her suspicious eyes on mine, when I had returned, and when I

had assured her the look of tension relaxed ; but only momentarily, for her next question brought an appearance of great excitement.

“ Is that girl with you—Maud M‘Gregor ? ”

“ Yes, she came, but the nurse forbids you to see her, and I am sure, Mrs Gray, it is unwise.”

“ I will see her ; why should it hurt me ? Nothing in this world will ever hurt me any more. I will be quiet and try to sleep after she’s gone.”

Maud was pale but quite composed when at last I took her in. I would have left them, but Maud held my hand in her icy-cold one, and Mrs Gray, with a motion of her head that bade the nurse leave her, told me to stay.

The wild eyes of the stricken woman met Maud’s, which did not waver or flinch.

“ Stand here, where I can see you, Maud M‘Gregor.” Her speech was slow, and for the first time I noticed it a little thickened. It was a hard look, appraising, condemning, that travelled over Maud’s form and features, but Maud bore it calmly, with only a slight drawing in of the lips.

“ And you are the girl my son loves, are you ? ”

“ He has not told me so, Mrs Gray.”

“ But you expect him to ; you know he will,” the sick woman asserted, rather than questioned.

“I cannot tell.”

“Come, girl. You must have some hold upon him, or he would not defy his mother for your sake. Do you know his age? Do you know that he has not a penny in the world, and, unless I wish, he will never have a penny of his father’s?”

“I neither know nor care,” Maud replied, with a sturdy dignity. “I don’t think you should speak like this to me. I am the same age as Dick and don’t own a penny more, if you care for such information.”

“Do you mean to marry my son?”

“I have not made up my mind to marry him or any one else. I have thought little of marriage, and, indeed, Mrs Gray, I think little of anything but enjoying myself and having a good time.” She spoke carelessly, lightly, as if to dismiss the subject.

“Then you will give him up, you will not marry him?”

“I am quite determined not to marry him unless he asks me, but if he should ask me I will keep my answer for him.”

“Do you love my son, Maud M’Gregor?”

“I cannot tell you. I will not speak of that—you are not fair to me, Mrs Gray.”

“You do not love him, what could you know

of love? Will you promise not to marry him? Will you give him up? I am a dying woman, I have lived sixty miserable years, thwarted, crossed, bereft of all that was dear to me—each object, as it became dear to me, taken away or turned into a curse. Will you have me go to my grave at enmity with my only child because of a boy and girl fancy? How could either of you know anything of love—before you are thirty you will have only hatred, or weariness—which is worse—for each other. You could never be a help to him, nothing but a millstone round his neck, weighing him down all through life, wrecking him."

Maud's eyes never wavered from those of the poor distraught, pleading mother. She held her calm poise, but her face was pitiful to see.

"You are not a hard, cold girl," the pleading voice went on, after a pause, "you will do this to give peace to a dying woman? You will promise me, will you not?"

"Mrs Gray, it would be the easiest thing to give you a promise, but in my heart I would mean to break it, if I wished. I cannot give you an honest promise. It is not right to ask me. In years to come I may care enough for Dick to want him, and he might think he should

let my promise to you bind me. I think he is a hard man, Mrs Gray, he might keep me to my word."

"A hard man! Don't I know it? Like father, like son, hard as flint, both of them; unbending, right or wrong. If I had been a mild, timid girl I might have been happy—you are unsuited to Dick, you would make him wretched. If you promise, I will tear up my last will, which leaves everything away from Dick, and he shall have it all. Promise me, as you hope for happiness here or mercy hereafter, promise me now."

Maud sank to her knees beside the bed and was fondling Mrs Gray's hand. I had long before trembled into a chair, and my eyes were heavy with the tears I was too wrought upon to shed.

"I don't believe you are going to die," Maud was saying. "I think if you would rest and not agitate your mind you would get well, and then we could talk this over better. I am sure this excitement is bad for you, and you hurt me dreadfully. I don't want to vex you; I would like to make dying easier for you, or living either. Can't you trust me to try to do right, without exacting a promise?"

"Do you want me to die unsatisfied? You

think it so hard to give up a lover—I gave up mine—he was the whole world to me—a bad man, but I loved him. My only sister married him; he died a drunkard; but she died long before, broken-hearted.” There was a convulsive movement of her face, a sobbing breath choked her, and she grasped Maud’s hands. “Dick is all I have—I want to die at peace with Dick, I want to be good to him. Promise me! Promise me!”

“Won’t you give me time? A week? A day—just one day?”

“I have no time to give. Promise now.”

“Mrs Gray, I cannot, indeed. No one has a right to force me. I must fulfil my destiny, and, with God’s help, I’ll try to do it worthily. I will not promise.”

Mrs Gray bent upon her a deep, baleful look, from which Maud shrank as from a blow; she pushed aside Maud’s hand, which she had been holding, and closed her eyes. Nor did she open them or her lips for many hours.

Dr Graham came as we were about to leave the room, and he and the nurse passed in together. Dick was glad when I said I would stay the night and see to household matters. He looked very white and troubled, but his mouth was firmly set and his composure told

of repression, as well as strength. He asked Maud if she would wait and let Dr Graham drive her home.

The doctor was very encouraging in his report, saying Mrs Gray would get along unless there should be another stroke, of which he had no immediate apprehension. I was giving Maud some instructions about the house, where Hannah and Ted would likely have arrived, and I heard Dick say as he helped Maud into the gig: "I would have spared you this if I could," but I did not hear her reply, if she made any. I was sorry he and Maud could not get a private word; it would have comforted me if I had been in their place, for I was never much of a waiter, though it seems to come easy to them.

Conditions were increasingly favourable next day, and Doctor Graham told us his patient had announced her intention to get well, and was bending her will—"which is by no means weak," he added—to following out his instructions. The battle was half won, he said, with obedience and determination aiding nature.

I was in the sick-room relieving the nurse during her meal times, but Mrs Gray kept her eyes closed, and did not speak on any occasion, and I was very glad when a woman came, whom Dick had secured to help the nurse and oversee

the household, thus letting me free to go home.

Home, oh, but wasn't it good to get there! It never looked so pleasant and peaceful as it did that beautiful afternoon. The flower-beds were a riot of bloom, fairly shouting in their joy in the sunlight and soft air, the birds were beginning to sing their evening hymn, and the house looked so cool and orderly and inviting—such a contrast to the darkness and gloom of my poor Dick's home, and the wild discomfort of that awful camp. It's a very nice house, anyway, is mine, so comfortable and live-in-able, not a bit of stiffness or style about it, but it's just home, and I love everything in it. The vegetable garden, the trees, the shrubs, even the unpainted barn and sheds are all so dear and homey-looking.

Ted and Maud hugged me and danced a war dance; Hannah came to the kitchen door with the dish-pan she was scouring in her hands, and she with the happiest, smuttiest face I had seen in a long while.

Maud told me that Mr Jones had been there that day and she had kept him to dinner, and she looked at me so wickedly as she said: "I think I see fair signs of cutting you out, 'Baby mine, baby mine.' I never let him see Ted

alone one minute; I kept right at his heels wherever he went. Yum, but I was sweet to him! I dazzled his poor old eyes, and I fancy I made him see there were more berries on the bush than in the jam-pot. He promised to come again *very soon*, and I'll entertain him for you if you're good, you wicked, wicked heart-breaker!"

How much she guessed, or how much she had wormed out of Ted or his father, I could not tell, but from me she got not one word, good or bad.

Ted and Maud had been all taken up with fixing quarters for Ted's live stock, which now had increased from pigeons and rabbits to guinea-pigs, white rats, and bantams. Peter Snider had stolen time to help them in building a lean-to to the chicken-house, and they had kept Hannah from putting her washing out right up to Friday morning—a nice time of the week for a decent housekeeper to have her lines full!

Hannah had been getting very notiony ever since Maud came about the washing; not that she minded how much there was, because she seemed delighted to do all the pretty things, and did them so well it was a joy to see them, but she acted that queer about hanging them

out, that I thought she must be going daft.

After breakfast I went out to look at the lines, which I always think make a fine clean picture in their snowy whiteness against the green of the grass. I had to laugh at the way Hannah had managed to put all the garments in the centre, surrounding them with side and end walls of the sheets and table-cloths and such—it looked like a circus-tent without a top.

“For mercy’s sake, Hannah, what will you do next?” I asked. “What’s got into you, girl?”

“It’s to keep out prying eyes,” said she. “I don’t hold with no such awful exposures as I see on the clothes-lines around this section, where you can see in every yard the father and mother and all their children hanging head down with their arms flapping on one line, and on another the whole family cut off at the waist with their feet dangling. It ain’t modest and it ain’t decent.”

“Modest, rubbish!” I exclaimed. “Is that why you’ve been doubling over everything, and trying to make it look as if we all lived in pillow-slips. Are you ashamed of being born two-legged, girl? Do you want to make people think we are built on a pedestal and run around

on casters? Don't act like a zany, but go unfurl my union jacks to the breezes, and don't let me hear any more of such rubbish. Modest, indeed!"

She is the oddest girl, and I've come to think she is romantic. She tells me such stories of people she pretends she used to know, and every girl is just Maud and every man is Dick, unless he is a villain, and then he sometimes favours Billy Taylor and sometimes Mr Jones; and the wicked woman in the tales is always like enough to Martha Switzer to be her twin. It beats all how she dislikes Martha, lots worse since she was married. Martha drops in pretty frequently, since I had a big church tea-party for her and Switzer, and a great success it was, although Hannah sniffed all the time throughout the preparations.

Martha has just one trouble—that she tells about—in her married life, and that is over Switzer's bad habit of coming to table in his shirt sleeves. She makes such a grievance of it that it's getting big enough to cover up all her comforts. She told me even if he sat in the hot kitchen smoking his pipe with his coat on he'd come into the cool dining-room and throw it off, and unbutton his vest at the table.

She won't let him smoke indoors, except in

the kitchen or his little back room upstairs ; and when I advised her to give in about his pipe and buy him a house coat to wear at his meals, she laughed at me. She wasn't going to have *her* house turned into a smoke-house, she wasn't going to give in to that !

" Well, Martha," I said, " I think there's more happiness to be got by giving in than in any other one way. I guess it's a trouble to him to be shut away from you now ; but he'll get to enjoy it after a bit, and smoke more and more. I wouldn't think it fair to send my husband to the kitchen to take his comfort—no matter how homely the hired girl might be ; and as long as he'd rather be with me, I'd think it wise to make a good bargain with him."

She was very top-lofty indeed about it, but I think it hit home—especially about the hired girl, for her's is a pink and white peony and very pretty, if a man had eyes to see with, which Switzer hasn't, of course, or Martha would be still called Shanklin.

CHAPTER XXII

MRS GRAY didn't seem to be getting any worse, yet she made slow progress, if any ; and Dick was a prisoner, only slipping in for a half-hour's visit sometimes in the morning, sometimes later in the day, but rarely in the evening.

I don't think he had spoken a word to Maud alone, and neither of them seemed to have any wish for speech ; and yet the time for Maud to go home had almost arrived, and also the day of the opening of the term at the University. He would want to go, it would be a real trial to him to be delayed, and yet how could he leave his mother ?

He looked harassed and weary, and I think it did him good to drop in for a word of cheer with us ; and we were cheerful enough, if that was any comfort.

Ted and Maud had been making great alterations in Ted's room, making a window-seat and book-shelves, putting up new curtains, and down a new rug, and staining the floor. It was a

pretty room—an angel-child's room, Maud said—but it was just the thing for a nice boy, I thought.

Mr Jones hadn't been around, but the day came when Ted received a letter from him saying he was coming the next day, "the month being up," as it was, to a day.

Ted didn't show me the letter, but I am sure Maud had read it, and he and she were doing a lot more conspiring and chuckling than was called for.

"He's coming to tea," Maud informed me in a tragic whisper, "and we want to receive him in style. You dress up grand, but make yourself look homely, *if you possibly can*. Frizz your hair and wear a yellow bow, if you can find one, and haven't you a fawn-coloured dress? Nothing short of fawn or drab or yellow would ruin your complexion. Oh, your old tan poplin—ancient but honourable; yes, wear it, and the rose point bertha—it's an antique, too. Ted and I are going to put on our bestest—we want to receive him as if he were the Bishop of Kalamazan. We must knock him silly from the word 'go.' Now I'll go put a cap and apron on Hannah and tell her about tea; we must have state and ceremony."

"Come back and tell me—" but I spoke to

the empty air, for she had run downstairs, first turning to make a saucy face at me.

I made a precious fright of myself, according to orders, seeing that chimed in with my feelings, for I felt ugly enough in all conscience. What should I say to the man? What could I say, so that he would go away and leave Teddy with me? I was just as badly off as I was a month ago, with nothing better to say, just the same thing, except to make it plainer and bitterer, as I'd grown to feel more disgraced and outraged. I hadn't much pride, but what I had was flat enough when I thought of Mr Jones and his daring to believe I'd have him.

Ted was passing my door to go downstairs, and I called him in. He was dressed in his best—a suit he'd never worn, it being a little too big for him when I bought it, but he'd filled out so lately it suited him well and made him look older and bigger.

"Now, Ted," said I, "tell me the meaning of all this."

"It's all play-acting, Auntie. Me and Maud are laying for the old man, and you mustn't spoil it."

"That's no way to talk of your father; and, Ted, your grammar all goes to bits when you're a bit excited."

"Maud says that shows it ain't natural to me. But I'll go back to grammar and all that when we get Pa settled."

"What do you think you'll do?"

"Well, it's like this. You don't want to give me up, do you?"

"No, Ted."

"And you won't, will you?"

"Not unless I have to."

"Well, it looks like there'd be trouble, cuz he says he's going to take me—unless—— Well, what Maud has laid out is for you to be real pleasant, but to let me go easy if he says the word. You don't need to say a thing, only don't try to stop me, and I'll play I'm going. But if I do go I'll come back sure, sure, if you want me, Auntie; and he'll be the gladdest man to get rid of me—for he can't farm this child out any more to be half-starved."

Ted and Maud were playing croquet on the side lawn, with one eye on the road, and Hannah was sitting in the old splint rocker, all dressed up, doing crochet-work. She told me everything was made and ready, and it would be a "scrumchus" tea. She didn't look knowing or say a word, so I made no remarks, but went to my corner with a book, feeling like a fool.

I heard Hannah go "rock, rock, rockety-rock, rockety-rock," in the old grandfather's chair; we called it that because he'd have liked it if we'd had a grandfather, which we never had, except by report, seeing he'd died on both sides (both father's and mother's, I mean) before any of us children were born. It was very still. I could hear the solemn tick of the old hall clock, the apologetic tick of the fine marble one on the mantel, and the impudent clickety-tick of Hannah's alarm clock in the kitchen. There was the sound of a far-off cow-bell, the chirp of a robin, the grasshoppers tried over and over their two shrill notes, and all the while the chair went "rockety-rock, rock, rock, rockety-rock." It's surprising how many noises you hear when everything is still.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of a great fall and a clatter and noise—for all the world like a cat having a fit, and then I heard Hannah's voice talking angrily, and the sound of blows.

I jumped, dropping my book, but my dress caught on the arm of my chair, and it took me a minute to clear myself, while the sound of pounding went on.

"Why, Hannah, what are you doing? What's the matter?"

There she stood above the old rocking-chair, which was overturned, with a broom in her hands, beating it soundly.

"Why, Hannah, girl, are you crazy?"

"I'll learn you, you wicked old rip!" she said, whacking away at the chair and taking no notice of me. "I'll learn you to use langwidge in my kitchen—you, you pious, peaceful-looking, proper old fraud! You, with your smug face and your bad words! You'll be teaching Ted profane swearin' next, you old heathen, you! Take that, and that! Now, will you be good?"

She picked up the great chair, shook it well, and stood it in a corner with its face to the wall.

"What's the meaning of all this?" I asked in amazement.

"You may well ask. It's your chair." Her voice was angry, and her face was drawn into truly savage lines as she turned to me. "I've stood its wicked ways till I'm wore out with it. I've tried and tried to change its tune, but just as soon as everything gets quiet it's at it again."

"Why, what has it done?"

"It's kep' swearing, that's what it's done; black oaths it's kep' saying; sometimes real pleasant-like and sometimes wichus. Dam——"

“Hannah!”

“It isn’t me—blame your old chair. ‘Darnation—darn you, darnation—darn you!’ it said, as plain as plain, every time I rocked. No matter how I hitched or jerked, it wouldn’t change, except to say worse.”

Which makes me think we can interpret the speech of even a rocker according to what’s in our own mind. I’m afraid it will never have a soothing, peaceful sound to me again.

I think likely Hannah was excited, and the stillness got on her nerves. It was exactly like her, she’s so various.

Mr Jones came along at last in a rattley-jointed, one-seated buggy that creaked “I’m but a stranger here,” over every rut and stone —of which our road had a many.

He held the lines high up and far out, over a freckled grey horse that hadn’t spirit enough to wag a fly off his own ear. He sat up very straight, like I’d seen Ted do playing cow-boy on the saw-horse with rope lines hitched to the stable door.

He was going to tie the horse outside, but Maud went out and told him to drive to the barn, and when he came in Hannah showed him up to Ted’s room to make himself tidy.

Maud sent Ted after his father, then inspected

me, twisted me around, pulled my hair out scarey, tucked down my belt, and said I looked like a ten cent chromo. She flew around helping Hannah set the table, putting out all my best silver, china, and glass, and never did it look nicer or more festive.

I sat down by the parlour door to wait, and I could hear Ted talking very loud, but Mr Jones' voice was extra low. I didn't hear one word he said. A jerky sentence now and then came floating down the stairs as Ted moved about.

"Yes, it's all new—Maud and I did most of the work." "Dandy book-shelves, ain't they? And look at all these clothes." "Nup, I didn't show her your letter. She didn't want to read it." "'Tain't no use." "No, she won't have you." "She kin do as she's a mind to, I guess." "She says anybody that wants me is welcome to me." (Oh, Ted, Ted, what a story!) "You don't want me, where'll you put me, if I go?" "'Course I don't want to go; this suits *me* all right, and you're dead silly taking me away when I don't cost you a cent here." "That ain't impudence, it's plain sense." "Oh, Dad"—this with tragic violence—"don't you soak that silver-backed brush in the dirty water—Maud gave me that brush. No, nor in the pitcher,

neither!" "Me go? Why, a' course, if I have to." "She don't care." "She can get lots better boys than me—I'm lazy, I am; I hate work." "Huh! you can't spite nobody but yourself that way." "She'll likely go a-travelling if she gits quit of me." "If you're so dead anxious to pay a boy's board why don't you take Johnnie—Johnnie's that miserable down at Aunt Jack's; they sleep three in a bed, and he never gets enough to eat." "All right, I'll shut up." "Hain't got any hair oil—that's perfume." "Come along down, then."

Maud sat at the foot of the table and I at the head, with Ted in his own place at my right, and his father opposite him. We were all on our dignity, but dreadfully gracious, and I never saw Mr Jones so ill at ease. I never saw Maud or Ted behave so well before, nor have such pretty manners; they were so polite and attentive to their elders, so sweet to each other, so dainty and fastidious with their eating, and talking all the time like high society people in a yellow-back novel.

Maud was fairly flattering in her attentiveness to Mr Jones, asking him his opinion on all sorts of questions, speaking of books I'd never so much as heard the names of, deferring to him

and puffing him up shamelessly. Ted talked about base-ball leagues, lacrosse teams, wild animals, and play actors, while I got in a word or two about religion and the crops. Mr Jones was flustered; he put sugar an inch thick on his boiled tongue, and mustard on the potato croquettes, but he kept his eyes on Maud pretty well all the time, and I caught some of the dangerous glances she was casting at him.

I was a bit out of it at first, but soon fell into the spirit of the game, while Mr Jones got more and more flabbergasted. He had come with quite an air and a strut, but he soon began to get wilted-looking until he couldn't say "Certainly, Ma'am," or "Very true, Miss," without coughing first.

After tea Maud asked him did he play backgammon or bezique, and when he said he didn't she got out the checker-board. Ted said his father was a great player and could beat her with eight men, but inside of an hour Maud had beaten him four games, and he refused to play any more, nor would he try his hand at "give-away."

"The fact of the matter is," said he, wiping his brow, "I am in no mood for play. I would like a few minutes' private conversation with you, Miss Wogg."

"I hoped you were enjoying it as much as I was," Maud said reproachfully, and then the poor man had to prostrate himself all over in apologising.

"Shall we go out on the veranda, Auntie?" Maud asked innocently, but with her wickedest look.

"Don't disturb yourself. I'll see Mr Jones in the parlour," I answered shortly.

With that Ted picked up a lamp and carried it into the front room, drew down the blinds with unnecessary fuss, asked me was I in a draught and would I like the windows shut?

Maud stood at the door talking with Mr Jones while Ted finished his tomfoolery, bringing me a stool for my feet and a pillow for my back, as if I were a cripple just fresh from amputation. Then he took Maud's arm and they marched from the room, shutting the door after them, and if Mr Jones felt more of an idiot than I did he ought to have been in Bedlam.

I just knew Maud and Ted were in some corner that blessed minute holding on to each other and laughing fit to kill themselves.

I don't know where Mr Jones began, nor what he said nor how I answered, but his voice was like a penny whistle with bronchitis, and

mine was a small, thin squeak from I don't know where.

But when he said, "So you have been playing with me. You have raised my hopes only to fling me down to despair," I plucked up spirit, and after a few preliminary passes gave him a piece of my mind.

"So you are casting me and my son off, is that what I am to understand?"

I suddenly remembered the part I was to play, and answered carelessly: "Oh, I'll keep Ted, if you like. I've nothing against him; he's rather a nice boy since Maud has improved his manners; and since he's filled out somewhat his looks are not so against him. I will keep my word, if you choose—keep him, educate him, provide for his future—but I can't marry you, I won't, I don't want to, and that's final."

"You refuse my hand and my heart's best love?"

"Yes, all your hands and every love you've got."

"Then will you please to tell Ted to pack his things and come?"

"I'll call Ted, and you can tell him what you please," I said; and when I called him in Maud came with him.

"My son," said Mr Jones, with difficulty

clearing his throat enough to be heard, "Miss Wogg does not wish our company. You will please get ready and go with me at once."

"To-night? You don't mean to-night?" exclaimed Ted, astonished. He stood before his father, looking almost handsome, his face flushed, his hair a little tumbled, his best suit, wide white collar, and red bow being so becoming.

"Instantly. This moment."

"I can't pack to-night; I haven't boxes for my pigeons or guinea-pigs, and the door of the rabbit-hutch isn't very safe. Can't I stay a while longer, Aunt Polly, till Maud goes, anyway?"

If he was acting, he did it well. I answered: "I am willing you should stay; it isn't my doings."

"We are despised and made a laughing-stock. Go you and do as I bid you!"

"Where are we going to stay to-night?"

"At Mrs Scott's"

"I don't want to," wailed Ted. "They'll laugh at me, and say Miss Wogg turned me off. And I'd have to sleep with you, and I—I can't sleep with anybody—it makes me nervous."

"Your father's only joking," said Maud; "see what trouble he has not to smile."

I never saw anything less like smiling than that man looked ; he couldn't speak a word without his lips being drawn back to show where his wisdom teeth weren't, his jaws were that set.

"It's no joke to me," he said. "You go get yourself ready, Ted."

Ted turned to leave the room, and I would have followed him, but he said mournfully : "Don't trouble, Auntie, I can manage. I'd rather be alone."

Maud slipped over beside Mr Jones, and I heard her say : "You are very, very unwise. If I were you I'd keep this thing quiet. You'll only be ridiculed. It will tell against you, even with a widow-woman ; it will always stand in your light. You, such a fine man, too ; why, there's no telling who you might get, only you have so many children——"

I went out into the dark dining-room and didn't stir until Ted came down, and I heard a cry of surprise from his father and Maud.

I went in hastily, and there stood Ted, looking the most forlorn little object you ever saw. His face was all smeared, his hair was plastered down on his brow under an old cloth cap that had lost its peak and was too small,

while what was left of the old clothes he came in covered the rest of him.

“I couldn’t find the sto—stockings I came in, nor my old boots,” he said to me, looking sullen and wretched, “but I put on the worst ones, and father can send them back for your next boy when he buys me new ones.” He kept tugging at his sleeves and pulling at the legs of his panties—which came away above his knees—and he didn’t appear to have any shirt on, but a blue-spotted handkerchief was tied around his neck.

He and Maud must have had a merry hunt in the attic finding the old things, and they had unearthed the old broken carpet-bag that had come with him too, and now with one heave he turned its contents out on the floor, such rubbish as it mostly was, his own private treasures—shells, stones and curiosities, all the gifts he had received, his birthday wallet, two or three books he had bought, Maud’s silver-backed brush and hand mirror, Hannah’s framed photograph, a gay wool muffler and a miscellaneous collection of garments, mostly rags.

“You see, I’ve only taken my own things,” he announced, with a wave of his arm and several inches of thin, bare wrist. “Guess

you'll have to git a new boy that'll fit my clothes, there's such slews of them. But he can't have my animals ; father'll have to send for them, and the setter-pup Dick promised me."

" You can't go looking such a scarecrow as that," said Maud. Mr Jones seemed paralysed and said nothing at all, only gasped once or twice.

" It's how I came," Ted returned, stoutly, " only the boots and stockings are better." He held up a dingy-looking striped shirt. " That's my shirt, only I couldn't get it on, and my coat wouldn't button over one, anyhow. There now, would you look at that!"

There was a sound of tearing as he stooped, and off flew a couple of buttons, like corks from a pop-bottle.

" Guess you'll have to drive to town. I can't more'n hold together till daylight. And there's my bob-sleigh and my stilts that I've forgot, and I don't know where's my base-ball club."

" I didn't think of all this. I don't think I thought—I—I—you—I can't take you anywhere looking like that." Mr Jones looked around helplessly, stuttered and stumbled, wiping his brow and shuffling his cold hands.

" I do look different," said Ted sadly ; " every-

body'll guy me, but it's real dark. You said we couldn't be beholdin' to Aunt Pol—to Miss Wogg for anything more. She's bought such stacks of things, even if it was for charity. She's been real good to me, and I——”

With that all the play-acting dropped away from Ted. He looked at me, and giving one howl hurled himself at me, and clung to me crying in a genuine tempest of boyish grief. I held him to me, tight as I could hold, saying nothing, but keeping my face turned away. I don't like any one to see me cry.

“Look at that, will you!” cried Maud to Mr Jones, rising and stamping her foot in a fury. “Now, ain't you ashamed of yourself? Call yourself a man and a father after that! *Don't* you think you have done enough harm? *Aren't* you ready to say you are sorry, and go away and try to be a better man?”

“Perhaps I am, Miss Maud,” he answered meekly; “I'd like to keep your good opinion, if it isn't too late.”

CHAPTER XXIII

I DON'T know how Dick bore up at all.

I only went up to the farm two or three times a week and came home every time half sick, with my nerves all jangled, after sitting with Mrs Gray less than an hour. And Dick was there day and night; she would not rest easy unless he stayed right in the room, would wake out of a sleep if he left her, and never stop saying, "I want Dick," until he came back.

She hadn't much to say to me; I thought sometimes she'd rather I stayed away. But indeed she had very little to say at all; about all it amounted to was "Where is Dick?" and "What day of the month is it?" She asked those questions over and over.

Dick told me at last what he thought was the reason of the latter question, and from what I saw and heard before and afterward I came to know the kind of life mother and son had been leading.

After his return from college and until after

Maud came there had been peace and harmony between them. Then Dick's coming to my house every evening, coupled with his asking his mother to show Maud some attention, roused her suspicions ; she became jealous of his visits, tried to prevent them, and, finding she made no impression, taxed Dick with loving Maud.

He laughed at her, would not take her seriously, would not either affirm or deny, but it was the end of peace. All the old trouble, re-animated and doubled, was added to the new, and to bring about a final catastrophe she tried her hand at match-making. Miss Wing, tender and gentle, with her substantial background of property, was urged upon Dick's notice, and her visit was brought about.

Then Dick told his mother plainly of his love for Maud and his hope of winning her, but that he had no thought of marriage until his college course was finished and his life's work well begun. After a wild outburst of passion, which Dick feared would wreck her life or her reason, she seemed to give up the struggle and said no more. Then began a new line of attack—she was all love and gentleness, leaning on him, consulting him about business concerns, until she asked him once more, for her sake, because of her loneliness and her love for him,

to give up college and stay on the farm, and she would say no more of either Maud or Dora Wing. How she urged, pleaded, threatened, I could imagine, but Dick was firm, and finally he said: "Mother, the University opens on the 1st of October, and, if I am alive, I mean to be there."

"Then it will be over my dead body," she cried.

"Over your body, dead or alive, if necessary. But when the day comes I intend to be there."

The next day she had gone into town alone and executed a new will, and then the stroke had overtaken her.

Whence came her idea of appealing to Maud none can tell, for all thought of her seemed to have gone, and only the documents that were beneath her pillow, and which she would not allow to be removed, and the day of the month, seemed to remain in her mind.

She seemed to grow neither better nor worse, seemed not to suffer, but there was an anguished look in her eyes—the eyes of one dying of hunger and thirst in the midst of plenty—that wore on me, terribly, and I could see how the strain was telling on my poor Dick.

But he had a good deal of her nature. He had never questioned either Maud or me as to

what had taken place at the interview with his mother, and Maud had not spoken of it to me either.

I am not a bit like that, I can't sit still and say nothing, even if I know it would be better. I'd have to stir around and see if an explosion wouldn't clear the air. I know it's a good proverb to "Let sleeping dogs lie," but my way is to wake them up to see if they are not sick, and like as not it wouldn't take long to find out I was the sick one.

For some days I'd been having face-ache and neuralgia, as I thought, and put it down to nerves and worrying over Mrs Gray. Maud was to go home on the 30th, and Dick had arranged to go with her as far as Hamilton, and then on to Toronto for the opening of the term. Neil M'Gregor had made it very clear that it would not do for her to stay longer, so Maud was going, whether Dick did or not.

By dawn on the 29th I had come to the conclusion that it was toothache I had, and I knew which tooth, and any one was welcome to it. I had blistered my mouth inside and out with every hot application I owned, and had pranced and danced most of the night.

There was a little scrap of a moon left over, looking tired and ashamed of being out so late,

when I went to the barn and hitched up Brownie to the top buggy.

Several times, while I was preparing, the tooth pretended it was going to stop, but as soon as I indulged a hope it began again, more furiously than ever.

Hannah had come down and lighted the fire, though it wasn't fairly dawn, but she had heard me rampaging around and knew tea was good in times of trouble. I took a few gulps of tea, but the look of scorn I gave when she wanted me to eat, let her know how bad the ache was—for generally I would rather miss getting up than miss my breakfast.

Brownie's pace didn't please me, the way I flicked the whip and slapped the lines didn't please her, and we were a bad-tempered pair when we reached the dentist's.

Well, I had it pulled; extracted is too polite a word for a job like that. It came hard, I thought it hurt. Seeing I kept from making a fuss, I expected reward for my courage by having the ache stop at once. It was different—I could feel that right away—but it was no better. It began a sidewise motion, then tried up-and-down jerks, like a frightened horse tugging at a tie-line. Then it broke into a

frantic gallop that never changed at all, except to get worse.

"I told you I thought it was ulcerated," the dentist said, as if throwing the blame on me helped it any.

I asked him would he please put the tooth back and jerk it again, having it taken out was ease compared with keeping it out. He said it would not ache long, not so very long, and put something on to soothe it that made it ten times wilder. He said the ulcer had or hadn't come out with the tooth—I didn't notice which, but whichever was wrong happened—but he refused to remove the balance of the row to see if he had got the right one. He said I'd be sorry to-morrow if I woke up and found all my teeth on one side. Sorry? There wasn't room in me for more sorrow than I had already.

I had to drive home with that rearing, tearing, grinding, stamping, beating, hammering, throbbing, thumb-screw-rack going on in one small corner of my only lower jaw. Brownie knew I was crazy, and thought it well to humour me. She went fast when I said so, and stopped and nibbled grass when I got out on the road and sat on a culvert with my head hanging over, or raced up and down to keep myself from howling aloud.

As for groaning, I kept that up pretty constant, though I knew it didn't help a particle, and that I'd stop it if I had a grain of self-respect.

Dick came at seven, and found me out in the garden digging up the vegetable beds. I told him all about it, and you never saw a man so sorry as he seemed. My, but he'll make a beautiful doctor! He said he was sure he could get something at the drug store that would help me, if I would trust him.

I told him to call it prussic acid, and make it strong.

When he came back he applied something inside and outside, and gave me a nice little tablet to swallow. Then Maud put a rug and pillow in the hammock, covered me up, put a wool thing over my head and a hot-water bottle at my feet, and the two of them sat down on the steps near by.

I knew I couldn't stay still five minutes, but I determined to try, because I did not want Dick to know how much worse he'd made me.

I kept saying, "I'll count just twenty more, and then I'll let myself get up;" and I'd count—begin again—count—till—somehow—

Something woke me.

I couldn't remember where I was, nor who.

I tried to move, but couldn't. I tried to open my eyes, and through the least unwilling one I looked up and saw the stars.

Then I knew I was dreaming, and in my dream I heard Dick telling Maud that he had heard all about Charley M'Ginnis from Dora Wing, and he thought it was a pretty good joke ; especially as it had done no lasting harm. M'Ginnis and Dora had made up their quarrel, and were engaged and happy.

Then I became conscious that real voices were sounding, Dick's and Maud's ; they floated dreamily, but I heard the words. "If I can leave mother, I will drive you to the station and say farewell. You will know it was utterly impossible to get away if I am not here, Maud."

"I will understand perfectly."

"I am not happy, letting you go like this. But we will have a long life for plain speech, please God. If I can make it easier for my poor mother, by waiting, I shall be glad. But it is hard for me, and I hope—I should say 'I fear,' but that is beyond me—I hope it is hard for you."

"It isn't easy, because I like things to happen quick. I want to reach out and grasp every pleasant thing, I want to enjoy and be

happy right now. But I understand you and your self-repression, your willingness to stand by and wait. I don't think I will misunderstand any more. Without your having said a word, either. I came to see clearly by seeing your mother. It came to me as a revelation—the knowledge of your life and your nature. My poor Dick!"

"Maud—Maud—How can I let you go?"

The gate clicked, and my heavy eyes opened dully.

Dick had been outside, it must have been the sound of the gate as he passed through that first aroused me. He stepped back and stood beside Maud in the pathway. He held her hands clasped close against his breast.

"I think you might—kiss me, Dick. It would mean—all—everything—you want it to mean."

"Darling," he said. And again "Darling." I heard but I saw nothing. I could not have seen, even if I had tried, for the tears were raining down my face like a blessed summer shower.

Oh, love, love! Is there anything in this world, or the world to come, that can compare with love?

Love, young love, ah, cherish it, children,
guard it, keep it pure, profane it not!

The difference between highest heaven and
lowest hell, it seems to me, is only the presence
or the absence of love—for “God is love.”

CHAPTER XXIV

MAUD came to me after I was in bed and knelt down with her head beside mine.

“Is the pain all gone?” she asked, and when I said it was, she patted my cheek with her soft little hand.

“Auntie, I am so happy, but I never felt so sad in all my life.” She spoke in a low, musing way, with many pauses, and a voice so full of thrilling sweetness I never heard before. “I want my mother, Auntie; I am homesick for my mother. I feel so weak and young, and yet so old, as old as Eve! I feel as if I had been blind and groping all my life, and now the light affrights me. A girl needs her mother when she loves a man—when she first looks with love into a man’s eyes, and he lets her see what love is. Auntie, I love your boy Dick till every breath is a pain, the sweetest, sorrowfullest pain a girl ever felt. I want to be worthy of him, I want to help him; you must teach me how to be wise, Auntie; you must love me,

because no one else on earth can make your Dick happy. How dare a woman marry a man she does not love! And Dick's mother never loved her husband—how could she hope to be happy, cheating him and her children so, the poor innocent children! I want to make up to Dick for all he has lost; but we are so young, we'll have to wait a long, long time. You are glad, aren't you? And you do love me?"

She went to sleep with her head on my shoulder, after I had told her all the short, sweet love-story of her mother, who was my best loved cousin. All night she slept in my arms, while I laid awake seeing visions—the ghosts of bygone dreams stole past, the pale shades of hopes that had died before they were born, flitted by.

My heart cried out hungrily, "Oh, that I might have had a son like Dick, a daughter to turn to me, a living soul that was part of me, to whom I had given life and love—" For the deepest wells of mother-love oft lie hidden in the hearts of those who have no husband.

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Ted and I drove into Dunston with Maud and saw her off, for Dick had not come, nor any message from him.

Afterward, being anxious, I went up to the

farm, late in the evening, and found Dick and the nurse so worn with fatigue they could hardly speak. It had been a trying day, Mrs Gray having been restless, with an increasing nervous excitability that taxed them to the uttermost. She had kept them at her side, rubbing her, turning her, fanning her, over and over, though it did her no good. But now she had grown quiet under the influence of morphine, and the tired watchers prepared for rest.

I arranged to stay during the night, the nurse going to bed, and Dick throwing himself dressed as he was on a sofa in the adjoining room.

It was barely dawn when Mrs Gray came out of her sleep-stupor and asked for Dick. I said he was resting, but she kept saying "Dick, Dick," till I thought it best to call him. He came hurriedly, sodden with sleep, and his mother whispered: "What date is this?"

"The 1st of October, Mother."

"Does college open to-day?"

"Yes, Mother."

"And you didn't go?"

"No, dear. I would not leave you, while you are ill."

"I'll be better soon. Is Mary Wogg's niece here now?"

"No, Mother. She went home yesterday."

"I feel better, Dick. I feel as if I could eat. Don't leave me, Dick."

I prepared her some beef-tea, but as she seemed to have dropped off into a doze I left it with Dick, who sat beside the bed in a big arm-chair. I laid down upon the lounge where Dick had passed the night, and in a moment was asleep, for I had slept little the previous nights and was very weary.

A cry from Dick startled me. The light of late morning flooded the sick-room. Dick was standing gazing down at his mother, who was lying, all crumpled up, turned over on her helpless side. Dick had slept, and on awaking, saw that her back was turned toward him, and called out in fear.

She was past movement, past speech, with but a spark of life in the glazing eyes, and under her lax hands lay papers crushed and disordered.

"It's another stroke, Mr. Dick," said the nurse. "She'll not get over this."

"Mother, Mother, can't you speak? Won't you try to speak?" he cried, seeing the haunting, anguished look of the eyes. "What is it, dear? Dear Mother, try to tell me. I love you, I do love you."

A flicker, like a gleam of light, passed over the

drawn face, and the lips seemed to move. "Is it 'forgive' you are trying to say? Oh, Mother, I do forgive. I have not been a loving son, but I do love you."

• • • • • • •
"Come out into the air, Mr Dick. She is gone."

The stroke was hastened very likely by the terrible effort the poor woman had made to destroy her last, unjust will. Perhaps she had felt the end was near, or perhaps she had waited only to see if Dick would leave her, but very pitiful were the signs of her last struggle—her ineffectual efforts to tear the heavy paper, the little rents, the crushed edges—then the desperation that had urged her to destroy it bit by bit with her teeth, until not a vestige of a signature remained.

And so the will that took effect—out of many she had made—was one drawn up directly after her husband's death, leaving everything, with her love and blessing, to "my dear son Richard," and I was named as his guardian, and Dr Graham and I joint executors.

So until Dick is of age he is under my charge, and he has already taken command of me, and has me in a state of utter subjection.

And as for Maud, she says she would simply

grovel, only Dick doesn't care for grovellers, and she has to be saucy and independent to keep him amused.

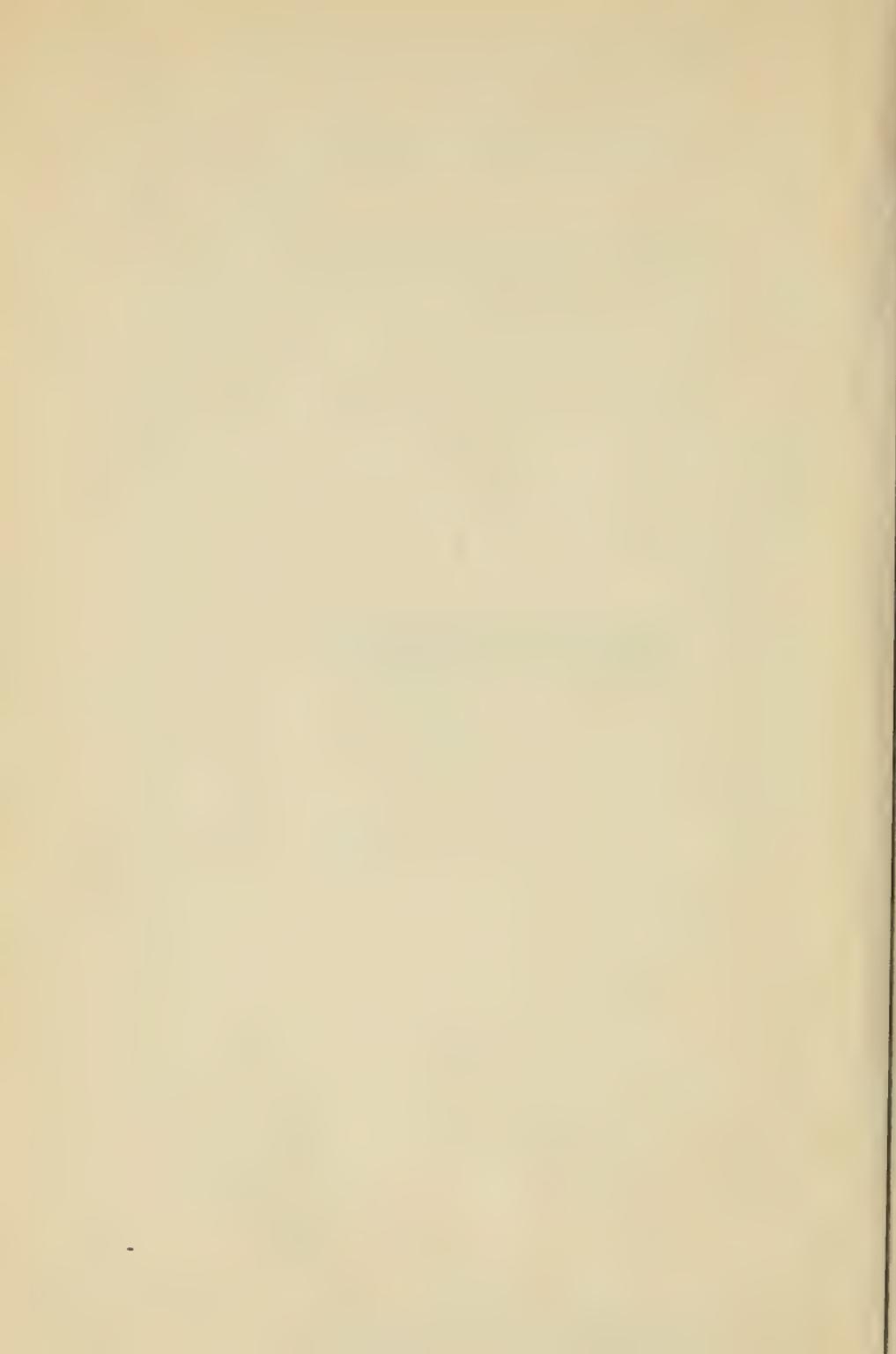
She is learning to ride horseback so that she can ride the pretty little bay that Dick has trained for her. They will make a picture, Dick on Black Prince and Maud on June.

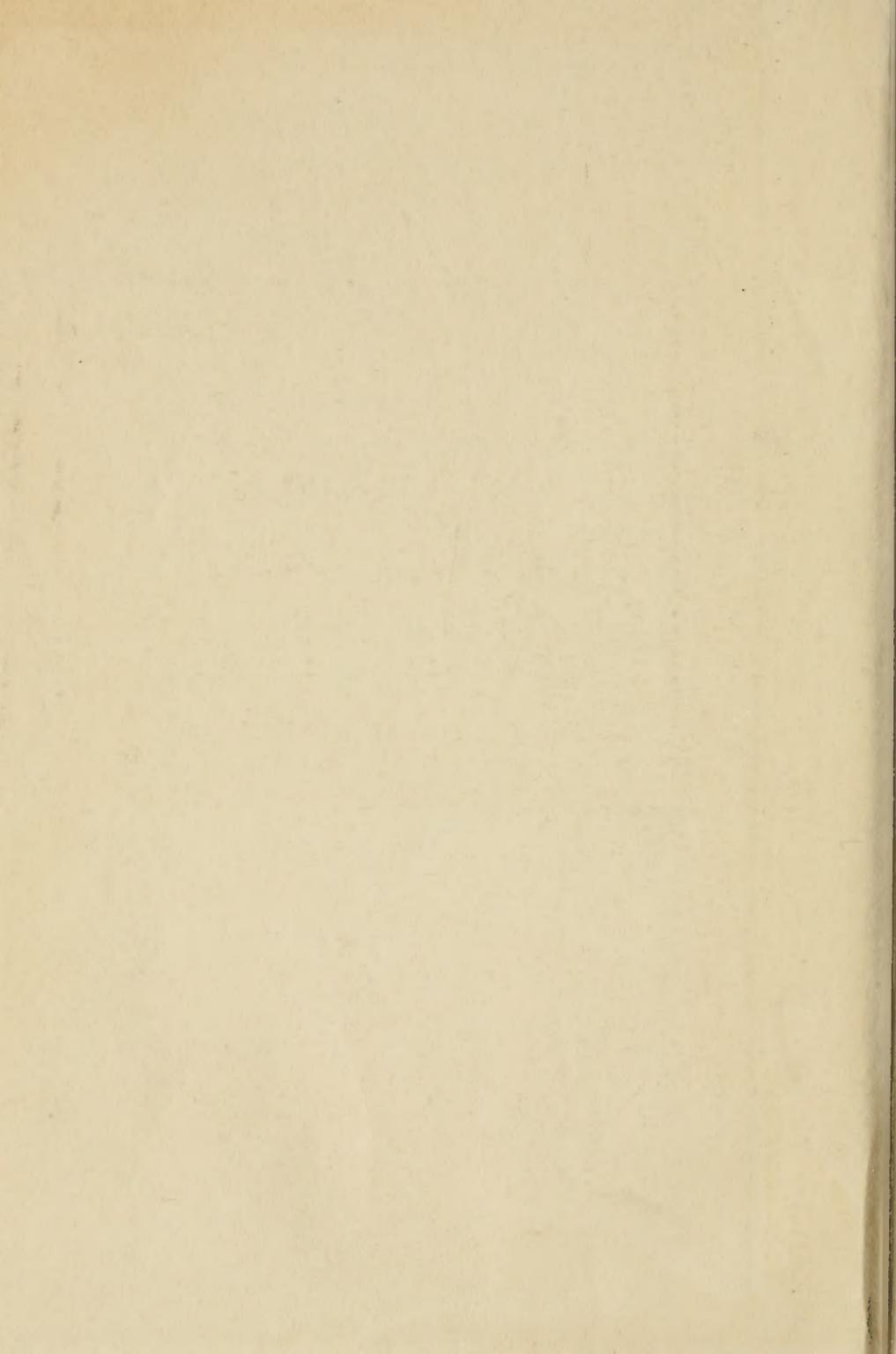
The farm is left in care of Peter Snider, and he is becoming so much of a man under the sense of responsibility that I believe Hannah will marry him. She told me she might think about it if I'd give her Teddy Jones, so that she wouldn't have to see too much of Peter Amos.

However, I don't think any persuasions will part Teddy and me; we will live on here, learning and loving, and, perhaps, by and by, when Dick is a celebrated doctor, he and Maud and the children will spend their summers with Teddy Jones and his Aunt Polly Wogg.

THE END

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Yeigh, Kate (Westlake)
A specimen spinster

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